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BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“MIRIAM.”

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TO

HER FATHER

THE FOLLOWING PAGES

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The Author.

INTRODUCTION.

THE author of the following Tale deems some apology due to the public, for offering them so slight a production, founded on a subject so fertile in materials; for Joanna the First of Naples, the high-minded and ill-fated prototype of Mary Stuart, bloomed and perished at an epoch in the world's history, which can scarcely be exceeded in interest by any given period. It presents a theme worthy of the departed Scott, or the living James.

Some years since, the writer perused Mrs. Jameson's *Lives of Female Sovereigns* with great pleasure, and the impression was a lasting one, — particularly so with regard to the biography of Joanna. She was led by it to examine all the records of that celebrated Queen, to which she had access. When afterwards deprived of her customary occupations, for two or three years, by partial blindness, one of her chief resources against the weariness of

forced idleness was in exercises of the Memory and Invention. She sometimes entertained herself with weaving fictions and planning little works, destined never to come forth from the chambers of her brain ; and amid the visionary processions which moved through her darkened apartment, many a time did the majestic figure of the Neapolitan Queen sweep sadly by, the heroine of the unwritten romance. As a memorial of those hours, when the faculties mercifully bestowed on every human mind asserted their power to charm away physical evil, she has, the last summer, committed some of their fruits to paper, and the task has again beguiled a few weeks of ill health. Want of eyesight has prevented her indulging in researches that might have graced her pages with antiquarian lore ; but she trusts she has avoided any serious anachronisms. Her narrative is not a work of pure fiction, as most of the leading characters and principal events are historical ; and she has endeavored to take no unwarrantable liberties with facts, as recorded by writers, who believed Joanna innocent of the crimes charged upon her by her enemies.

For a time, the author contemplated *attempting* a Tragedy, on the subject which is now presented in a less ambitious form ; but a strong consciousness of the high nature of the

undertaking and of the difficulties to be encountered by any one, who proposes to conform to the rules laid down by the established canons of criticism, deterred her from so hazardous an enterprise.

In the following Tale, she has remembered a wish often expressed in her hearing by judicious mothers; she has endeavored to discard the machinery usually employed in works of fiction; and to bring strong passions and affections into play, without the coöperation of that, on which the main interest of a romantic story commonly depends. She respectfully waits the decision of the Public, as to the degree of interest excited for a heroine, whose fears and trials are not interwoven with a love-tale. Her little work is published in the hope, that, if it win the approbation of her young readers, they may be lured by it to the fountains of history, ever pouring forth bright streams of pleasure and instruction. As the current comes gliding down from the urns of dim antiquity, it brings us awful truths, that deserve contemplation, — the insufficiency of human greatness, — the dangers of a blinding prosperity, — the terrible retribution, which so often overtakes guilt, even on this side of the grave.

JOANNA OF NAPLES.

CHAPTER I.

It was in the month of June, in the year 1382, on a day of unusual heat, that a solitary female walked her apartment in the fairest palace of Naples, while the whole city lay hushed under the spell of the calm, sultry noon. The siesta was upon the eyelids of the noble in his hall, and the lazzarone stretched his indolent limbs in the shade of some lofty wall; while the very waves of the lovely bay came murmuring sleepily as it were to the beach, where not a living thing stirred along the wide sweep. The sails of the fishing boats hung down motionless; the atmosphere seemed to quiver above the roofs of the city; the cone of Vesuvius, from whose apparently extinguished fires no smoke had risen for nearly two centuries, rose clearly defined in the pure realms of upper air,

and the sun, from a cloudless sky, poured down a flood of yellow beams that seemed to oppress man, beast, and inanimate nature with their fervor. But there was one, in that vast and populous city, who appeared unconscious of the hour and its influences. She was pacing a superb room in a palace which overlooked the bay, and held crushed in her hand a loose packet, while meditation, of a deep and anxious character, sat in her downcast eyes. Her tall figure was worthy of the countenance where still lingered an exquisite loveliness, though youth had long since fled; yet the touch of Time had scarcely woven a single thread of silver among the dark curls, which would have fallen in profusion about her face, had they not been confined with a propriety becoming her years, by a circlet of gold round her regal brows; from which a long veil depended over her graceful form and purple velvet robe. Her pale Italian complexion suited the Roman cast of her features. The sadness of her countenance was not that of a single hour's sorrow; a settled thoughtfulness was in her fine but deep sunken eyes, which marked her for one who had long been familiar with the lessons of affliction;—yet this was a Queen! In one of the fairest realms on earth, she had been the loveliest and loftiest! the theme of poets in that land of song, and fitted by the graces of her mind as well as person to wake and claim admiration

from the most gifted intellects of the age. It was the beautiful but unfortunate Joanna, Queen of Naples, whose existence had opened with every prospect of earthly felicity, which the heart of woman could crave, and who had been early taught that rank, beauty, wealth, and talent cannot ward off the fitting trials of this life from a helpless human being; powerful over a few fellow creatures, it might be; — powerless, in the hands of the unseen Ruler of people and potentates. The meridian of her eventful life was past, and there was little promise that its wane would afford that calm, which a wearied spirit craves, when the conflicts of youth have been fierce and many.

She sat down and looked between the massy columns upon the prospect; — it was beautiful but lifeless. The desolate feeling in her own heart gave a meaning to the universal repose, which did not belong to it; and she felt as if the unseen multitude, who slumbered under that broad sky, were to wake no more. She cast her eyes to the mountain, and remembering that it had been more than once the cause of sudden destruction to thousands, she shuddered. “But no!” she thought, — “the evils, I have reason to dread for my people, are of another stamp; and these gloomy forebodings rise not from the past dealings of God, but from what I know is in man — cruel, treacherous man.” She turned over the leaves of the

packet in her hand ; conned passages with a troubled air, and passing her hand over her temples as if they ached, she sunk into a long unbroken reverie, until the hottest hours were past. A soft breeze at last began to stir among the orange trees below the balcony ; the sounds of voices rose once more on the air, and a few figures appeared moving along the beach. Still she sat, her head leaning against a marble column, her eyes closed, and her fine features occasionally disturbed by the current of busy and anxious thought within. A faint tinge, a reflection from the crimson drapery that hung between her and the broad glare of day, was thrown upon her cheek, and the unconscious grace of her attitude would have riveted a sculptor's eye. The apartment was separated from two other chambers by doors, now thrown open for the sake of coolness, yet hung with rich curtains, waving in the rising breeze. A sound issued thence, which roused the dejected Queen ; the unsteady steps and suppressed laughter of children came from the ante-room, and presently the curtain was put aside, and two lovely faces peeped archly through. Sorrow fled instantly from the countenance of Joanna, and she extended her arms to receive the little intruders, who, finding themselves perceived, came laughing and bounding towards her. One was a noble, animated boy, about five years of age ; the

other, a little girl, scarce three;—and both, for an instant, clung round the neck of her who gave them so loving a welcome. The boy, however, soon betook himself to his sports, coursing about the apartment on the broken spear which he called his war-horse; while the little girl, with the gentler habits of her sex, sat contentedly on the lap of the Queen, playing with the rich ornaments of her dress, ever and anon shaking back the curls from her cheeks, and looking up with her inquiring eyes, as she awaited answers to her innumerable questions. She had already drawn the pearl bracelets from the royal wrists they adorned, and fastened one about her own brows, while the other encircled her throat, and was in the act of transferring the sparkling rings of the Queen to her own tiny fingers, laughing merrily at their disproportionate size, when the drapery was again put aside from the door, and a young and beautiful female entered. A glance would have decided her to be the mother of the children, though her fairy-like proportions and delicacy of complexion gave her the appearance of extreme youth. She was in fact scarce two and twenty, but had been six years the wife of Charles of Durazzo.

When Joanna found herself bereaved of her beloved sister, she had lavished upon her daughter the deepest affections of her nature; and to Charles, the son of her enemy, as well as to Mar-

garet, the daughter of her sister Maria, she had manifested the tenderness of a mother. Her palace had been their abode after the decease of their parents, and in their early union she had rejoiced. There the young Margaret had found a home from her very birth; there she was wedded; there had her two children been born; and there she was now bringing them up peacefully, under the protection of the august Joanna; while her husband, Charles of Durazzo, bore arms in the less genial regions of Germany. Never was there a nobler instance of magnanimity than Joanna's, in adopting the son of that prince of Durazzo, who had so often disquieted her reign; and her extreme fondness for the youth seemed justified by his bravery and talents. The young Margaret delighted in pouring forth the idolizing feelings of her heart to one who had acted the part of a mother to both herself and her husband. In the affection of her niece, Joanna had found consolation during the absence of her adopted son; and her childless desolation had been cheered by the caresses and sprightliness of their offspring. "Look," said she to the approaching mother, "your little Joanna would steal my sceptre, if it were within her reach, without waiting for the day when it may be hers!" There was something sad in her tone, which was inconsistent with the sportive manner in which

she held up the smiling face of the little girl, to show the pearl bandeau on her forehead ; but there was no reply to her remark. Absorbed in the children, it was some moments before she observed the unwonted abstraction of their mother. The boy was the first who drew her attention to it ; as he came making a sportive pass at them with his mimic weapon, she saw a sudden change pass over his bright face, and he stood gazing at his mother with a look of anxious wonder. Joanna turned, and observed that tears were trickling down the cheeks where smiles were wont to play. She rose in surprise and summoned the attendants to take away the children. They yielded reluctantly, and the miniature queen resisted, as they took the borrowed pearls from her and led her away, turning back her face over her fair round shoulder with many a sob.

When they were alone, Joanna endeavored to draw from her pale and trembling niece the cause of her agitation ; but in vain. She strove to speak, but seemed half choked with emotion ; and it was not until she had thrown herself on the neck of her adopted mother, and poured forth a flood of tears, that she uttered the words " My husband ! "

" What news from him ? " exclaimed Joanna, —
" You heard from him this day, by the same courier who brought despatches to me ? Is he not well ? I

have not heard otherwise, — at least not of his bodily health."

"He is well," said Margaret, "but oh, my mother, — my dear mother! he bids me" — She could not finish the sentence, and Joanna waited in dismay.

"Margaret," said she at last, "can it be possible that I divine what you would say? Can it be that he orders you to leave me?" — Margaret faintly murmured, "It is so," and sunk weeping on the cushions.

The blood rushed over the face of Joanna, and forsook it again; — becoming deadly pale, she whispered to herself, — "Proof strong and terrible!" and walked to the farthest end of the apartment, throwing aside the drapery from the window, and leaning her head against a column, as if in hopes that the fresh air might revive her. The brief illness passed away; but her lips were still white, when she returned with a steady step, and taking the hands of Margaret in her own, she said quietly, "Margaret of Durazzo, you shall go; — with all the honors of your rank, you shall pass from my palace, — from my kingdom, — from my protection, to that of your husband."

"Oh, my mother!" again exclaimed the princess, "do you part with me so lightly?"

“So lightly!” repeated Joanna, pressing her hand to her forehead, — “God only knows whether my heart will break or not; but think you I am one to mock a husband’s claim? — Have I taught you to love Charles from your cradle, — have I given my benediction on your nuptials, — have I been to him in the place of his departed mother, seeking in all things to gratify each wish of his heart, — and think you I could rob him of you at last? Margaret, were I to lie down this night on yonder couch, and know that I should never rise from it more, I would first speed you on your perilous journey. Your children too, doth he summon them?”

“He bids me sue for their company also; and why I weep so bitterly, I know not, since he asks but a visit, — a short visit, and promises to escort us to dear Naples again, in a few weeks. But mother! I have never, never left you for a single day, and though it be to meet my adored husband” —

Joanna interrupted her, — “The children too! I see it all! The involuntary hostages must be withdrawn. Margaret, look me in the face!”

Astonished at the almost stern demand, Margaret looked up; Joanna fixed a penetrating gaze on her sweet, innocent countenance, and then asked, — “Do you not know *why* your husband thus summons you to the rude camp?”

“Nay, mother, is it strange that he should wish to see me? How long is it since he has beheld wife or child?”

Joanna contemplated her ingenuous features a moment longer, and then murmuring, — “Guileless as the morning dew!” turned away with a deep sigh. “No, Margaret; it is not strange that he should wish to see you. Go to him, my child; your *visit* may not be so brief as you imagine; but be our separation long or short, my blessing will be with you; — and tell him I spoke no word to detain you, — uttered no murmur, — breathed no doubt.” The last words died away in a whisper, and Joanna turned to leave the kneeling princess with an air of abstraction; but suddenly recollecting herself, asked, — “Does he name a day for your departure?”

“To-morrow,” faintly articulated Margaret; “a troop of horse for my escort are without the city.”

Joanna’s cheek was again flushed as she exclaimed, “So soon! — are the hours so precious to him! Then the hurricane will come on apace! Margaret,” she added, more calmly, “set forth in the cool hour of morn, but do not seek to bid me farewell; do not send the children to me.” Her lip quivered as she spoke. — “I am not quite well, methinks; and I will not sadden their gay setting forth upon their travels with my tears. I have forebodings that it may be

long ere we meet again, and in solitary meditation only can I combat the weaknesses of my nature."

"Not well!" exclaimed Margaret, — "nay, mother, if you are not well, how can I leave you? Charles would not ask it, — would not expect it. Your color comes and goes strangely; indeed you are not well, and do you imagine I can depart to-morrow?"

Her plaintive question brought the tears, at last, into the burning eyes of Joanna. She pressed her lips on the forehead of the affectionate being, and said gently, "You must go, my child; it is a matter of duty, — of state-policy; and my honor as a Queen bids me not impede you. Alas! why should she, who bears the crown on her brow, wear the heart of a woman to ache with a woman's sorrows? — Go, Margaret; I am not ill, save in the spirit, and that you have often seen weighed down with many cares. Leave me, — but do not, — do not forget me! — do not cease to love me! — and Margaret, — hush! let not the walls hear me; — if evil counsellors come between me and the children of my adoption, — if they seek to steal away thy husband's love for me, — if they bid him wrong me, insult me, rob me, — bring him back, dearest Margaret! — win him again to this maternal embrace! — speak to him like an angel of peace, and save me from the wretchedness of despising one I have idolized!"

Overcome by her emotions, Joanna remained hardly conscious how far she had been hurried, with her hands grasping firmly those of her kneeling niece, and her head bowed down upon her breast. Margaret continued a moment speechless, with an air of utter amazement and horror, scarcely believing she had heard aright, and then springing to her feet, she exclaimed "Mother! what is it you say? — what is it you fear? — whom do you doubt? — Is it of my husband you speak? — of Charles? — Have the slanderers dared touch his unspotted fame? You do not, — you cannot believe one word uttered against his love and truth."

"Margaret," said Joanna, "there are things which may not be lightly believed; I *believe* nothing; but strange rumors have reached me. They tell me the tempter has been with him; — he is but a man, my child, and an ambitious one, — and I have lived to see the surest-footed fall, in slippery paths."

"Oh, mother!" said Margaret, "bitter must have been the experiences, which have poisoned so noble a mind as yours with suspicion. I will go to my husband; would I were with him now; for I know that a truer heart never beat. I will bring him to your very feet to deny the calumny with his own lips. He false, who has worshipped you from his infancy, and would have poured out his blood a thousand times in

defence of your rights ! Oh, none but a wife can know the heart of her husband ; and sure am I that Charles loves, venerates, and adores you, as I do. Would it were to-morrow ! ”

“ Would that another and another morrow were past, — until the last,” said Joanna, “ for the burden of life grows heavier each day, and I fear I shall become weary of it. I meant not to disturb your peace prematurely, my child ; I meant to have locked up miserable fears in my own heart, until their fulfilment came ; but to distrust the affection of Charles has given me pangs, that would not bear concealment. Leave me, Margaret ; to part with you at all is wo enough ; — to part with you thus is a trial, under which I must seek consolation at the foot of the altar. There, at least, I have found peace in the saddest hours I have ever known ; and there I trust I shall yet find it, whatever darker doom may be in store for me.”

As she spoke, she drew a small golden crucifix from her girdle, and pressing it to her lips, as she raised her swimming eyes to heaven, she placed one hand on the head of Margaret ; and whispering a short Latin invocation to the protecting Virgin, she turned and, walking slowly to the further end of the room, disappeared through a passage leading to a chapel. Mar-

garet, half blinded by her tears, gazed on her majestic figure till it vanished, and then, with a bewildered air and heavy heart, retired to her own apartment, to order hasty preparations for her departure.

CHAPTER II.

THE morning star was yet glittering over Vesuvius, when the blast of the horn was heard in the square before the palace, and knights, gorgeously arrayed, rode in from all quarters. Joanna had given orders that her niece should be attended from the city by a splendid cortége; and the proudest barons of her court came forth in obedience to the behest of their Queen, the younger not unwilling to prance in the train of so beautiful a princess.

Margaret roused herself from her broken slumbers to a sad consciousness that the day of her first departure from *home* had arrived; an event which can be devoid of interest only to the unthinking or cold-hearted, and Margaret was neither. The deeper causes of uneasiness, arising from her parting conversation with the Queen, were already floating from her mind; for she had persuaded herself that all would soon be well. She had but to see her husband, to converse with him, and all would be explained;

they would return together to the home of their youth, and the heart of their adopted mother would be eased, so that with the full ardor of youthful hope and confidence, she prepared to set forth. A flush of indignation indeed mantled her cheek, as she remembered how base had been the insinuations conveyed to Joanna; but her hope of an immediate and proud confutation was triumphant above all other emotions; and with a step as elastic as her own spirits, she descended to the court-yard, at the head of her maiden train. The great gates were thrown open, and she saw the square filled with plumed heads, glittering arms, and waving banners. Her little son, whom she led, broke from her and clapped his hands exultingly at the spectacle, while the blasts of the trumpets and shouts of the throng gave token of the popularity which attended Joanna and her family. Accustomed to the saddle, which had already assumed the shape used by fair equestrians in modern days, Margaret had preferred commencing her journey on the palfrey she rode on hawking expeditions; and the milk-white animal, gentle as he was beautiful, stood at the foot of a flight of marble steps, sweeping the ground with his flowing tail and rich caparisons. As she presented herself to the public gaze, glowing with youth and beauty, the first red beams of the rising sun fell upon her, and shrinking at the unexpected acclamations of

the people, she looked like a young Aurora, retiring as the god of Day advanced. Even as she descended the steps, conducted by a courtly knight, her reverted glances scanned the front of the palace, for she hoped to meet with one kind, parting smile from her whose presence she had been forbidden to seek ; but it was in vain ; and while she mounted and rode forth into the square, courteously bowing her head and lavishing her grateful smiles on the populace, she felt that her eyes were filling with tears of disappointment.

She did not, however, pass forth unmarked by one, whose heart yearned after her as she went. The royal canopy had that night sheltered a royal watcher, not, alas ! for the first time in her eventful life. With the first gray of morning, Joanna had again resorted to the chapel, and there she strove to shut out the confused sounds which indicated the early and unusual stir in that part of the city, where quiet generally prevailed at this hour, notwithstanding the restless habits of the Neapolitans. The distant trampling and neighing of steeds, the shrill blasts of the trumpets, and the bustle in a remote wing of the palace occupied by Margaret, occasionally broke on her devotions ; but at last, that most peculiar sound, unlike all others, and most familiar to royal ears, rose upon the air, and came with a full swell along the arched roof of the chapel, — the power of innu-

merable human voices, united in one mighty and prolonged shout. She dropped her rosary;—she knew that Margaret was leaving the safe and happy home of her youth. Again it came surging through the lonely chapel; and the imperious promptings of affection could no longer be resisted. She left the chapel and hastened to a gallery which overlooked the square; where, through a latticed window, she might gaze unobserved on the splendors beneath. Little attraction had the pomp of her nobility for her eyes, riveted on one object alone. She saw the princess in the centre of the glittering throng, managing her palfrey with exquisite grace, while her long, white plumes, lifted up by the morning breeze, danced gaily over her face, and gave to view its bright and bewitching smiles. For a single instant a pang shot through the heart of Joanna. “He would make her their Queen, even now,” thought she, “and cannot wait till the faded and forgotten Joanna rests in her grave!” She covered her face to shut out the spectacle; she struggled inwardly, and the better feelings of her noble nature rose with a momentary prayer, for she had learned that the worst enemies of our peace are not without, but within us, and to triumph there is to triumph every where.

When she looked again, the litters containing the children and their attendants were passing, but the

form of Margaret was still plainly visible; and she now saw her face sadly reverted. The princess was about to vanish from the square, when, by a sudden impulse of feeling, she checked her steed, — reined him about, — the knights around her drew up, — the procession halted, — and a solemn and respectful silence pervaded the whole throng, while the departing princess took one last, mournful survey of the palace. Joanna's hand was upon the lattice; her emotion was almost irrepressible; — she longed to rush upon the balcony, and in the presence of her assembled people, bestow another parting benediction on the lovely and innocent creature, whom she thought never to behold again. But, while striving with the impulse, she saw one of the barons respectfully take the bridle of Margaret's horse, and turning about, lead him round the angle of the street they were about to enter; while the princess drooping and manifestly in tears, drew her veil over her face, and in that sad guise disappeared from the straining gaze of Joanna. No acclamations now rose on the air; the stillness of universal sympathy pervaded the multitude; and Joanna stood mechanically watching the train as the knights rode, two and two, out of the square, until the last had turned the corner; the people crowded silently after, till not a human being was left in the vast space, save the lame beggars that lay in the porticoes. The

tramp of innumerable feet died away in the distance, and all was quiet and solitary; not even the footstep of an attendant was to be heard wandering through the palace; and for the first time in her life, chequered as it had been with many woes, Joanna's heart died within her, with a lonely and forsaken feeling. "They are gone, — they are gone!" is the idea that takes complete possession of the mind, when the young, gay, and beloved pass from our abodes. To Joanna, full as her mind was of the gloomiest anticipations, the hush which prevailed in the palace, after the bustle of departure, had in it something awful and deathlike; it seemed to her as if a funeral procession had left her gates.

In the mean time Margaret passed on through the fairy regions, which encircle the city of Naples; and upon her was not lost the fresh matin beauty of its matchless scenery. Her eye caught with pleasure the innumerable fishing boats, gliding almost imperceptibly over the mirror-like surface, scarce rocking as they went, and distinctly reflected, with their snowy sails, in the water. The faint night mist, which yet lingered at a distance, half veiled the islands, which rose looming from it like remote mountains; and over Posilipo hung the thin, cloud-like, waning moon, still visible, though the sun was considerably above the horizon. Absorbed in meditations, half sad and

half pleasing, she gave no encouragement to conversation ; but after they left these familiar objects behind them, and wound through vineyards and orange groves, she felt one pang more in exchanging the gay escort from the court of Joanna, for that of her husband's rude and warlike band. With all graceful courtesies, she bade adieu to the proud nobles, as one by one they passed before her, bending to the saddle-bow with their helmeted heads ; and as she saw them put spurs to their steeds, fall again into ranks, and sweep back along the road to Naples, soon lost among the foliage, she turned a doubtful glance on the warriors that surrounded her. It was a detachment of his most tried and faithful cavalry, whom Charles had sent to bring her into the distant plains of Lombardy, whither he had promised to descend and meet her ; and the perfect training of their steeds, the war-worn condition of their armor, and their scarred visages bore testimony that they had been engaged in no holiday service. Margaret resigned herself to their protection, with a feeling of confidence and security, inspired by the bare idea that they were her husband's soldiers,—that the familiar banner which flaunted above them was his,—that they had fought by his side, and were by him trusted with a most precious charge.

The day passed away without event, excepting that as they approached Aversa, her attention was fixed on the gray walls of a convent, rising above the trees, on the brow of a wooded hill. There was nothing peculiar in the object, so similar to many others along their winding way; but she saw an elderly knight of the party pointing it out to his companion with a frowning brow; and as they rode closer together, and fell into a low, eager conversation, still occasionally looking towards it with austere countenances, she felt assured that it had been the scene of some dreadful calamity,—perhaps, crime. Curiosity at last prompted her to approach them to inquire its history; when the name of “Andrea” fell on her ear. Horror-struck at the sound, she drew back in silence; and shuddered as she again fixed her eyes on those gloomy walls, within whose circuit, that prince,—the youthful husband of Joanna in her early and happy days,—had been so foully and mysteriously murdered. She knew that at the time, dark surmises had touched the character of Joanna; but she believed that her triumphant acquittal had promptly cleared her fame, and that her spotless course had, since, lived down all suspicion. She knew not that the delicate texture of a woman’s reputation retains a tinge forever, where calumny has once fallen; she knew not the existence of those uncharitable spirits, whose delight it is to believe the

worst ; who cannot forget that evil was once spoken, and will not suffer oblivion to gather round the cruel and idle slanders of bygone days. She little dreamed that the character of the pure and lofty Joanna, the kinswoman whose virtues she loved and revered so deeply, was to be handed down to posterity, a problem for the discussion of the antiquarian, a disputed point among the searchers into the dark things of history ; and that thousands would live and die under the impression, that early ripe in guilt as in talents, she had stained her soul, as she trod life's threshold, with a murder of peculiar atrocity.*

We will not trace the route of Margaret as she pressed on to a reunion with her husband. Impatient of delay, she could not be detained by invitations or proffered civilities from the court of Rome. Detest-

* "Public rumors, in the absence of notorious proof, imputed the guilt of this mysterious assassination to Joanna. Whether historians are authorized to assume her participation in it so confidently as they have generally done, may perhaps be doubted ; though I cannot venture positively to rescind their sentence." — "The name of Joan of Naples has suffered by the lax repetition of calumnies. Whatever share she may have had in her husband's death, and certainly under circumstances of extenuation, her subsequent life was not open to any flagrant reproach : the charge of dissolute manners so frequently made *is not warranted by any specific proof, or contemporary testimony.*" — HALLAM'S *Middle Ages*. Part II. Ch. III.

ing the character of the tyrannical Urban, of whom Gibbon remarks that "he could walk in his garden, reading his breviary, while hearing the cries of six Cardinals upon the rack in an adjacent room," she shrunk from the Vatican as from the den of a wild beast, and pursued her northward journey with as much celerity as possible for a train of females and children, unaccustomed to fatigue. At one spot, the Baron di Castiglione pointed out two routes, one of which led winding through plains and valleys, while the other, though far more rough and wild, would conduct them more speedily through mountain defiles to their journey's end; and on this she decided.

It was towards the close of a lovely summer's day that the little troop descended along a thickly wooded mountain road into a rocky pass. The cliffs rose high above them on each side, garlanded in spots with rough grass and tangled weeds, while here and there the larch and the pine sprang from the clefts, and partially clothed the gray eternal rocks with their sombre verdure. On the right, a torrent came dashing from the recesses of the hills, and with a perpendicular fall of some twenty feet formed a deep basin, from which it rippled quietly away down the valley. Round the basin was spread a carpet of the greenest and softest herbage; and its waters lay dark under the shadow of an enormous oak, that stood on its

brink. The gnarled roots of this monarch of the dell rose above the turf, or stretching away under the still water looked like sleeping serpents. The spot had an aspect so cool and tranquil, that Margaret was glad when she saw the Baron give a signal for halting ; and though she had preferred riding on horseback since noon, that she might enjoy scenery to her so new and picturesque, yet weary and heated as she was, it was a luxury to spring from the saddle upon the fresh turf; and throwing back her veil, she inhaled the bracing mountain air with delight. As she seated herself on one of the huge twisted roots by the basin, the children came rejoicing to her side ; her ladies gathered almost under the spray of the torrent to enjoy its freshness ; the warriors dispersed themselves in groups among the clefts of the rocks, and their steeds came panting to drink of the pool, or strayed quietly grazing down the little valley. The Baron di Castiglione, having despatched a single horseman in advance, removed the helmet from his gray locks, and summoning his favorite, the spirited boy, to his knee, established himself on a large fragment of rock, which had fallen from the cliffs above, whence he could command a view of the lower entrance into the pass. In a short time, fatigue hushed every one into silence, and the tranquil genius of the place seemed to have resumed his sway. The little

Margaret laid her curly locks upon her mother's lap, and soothed by the continuous dashing of the waterfall, sunk into a profound slumber; and the wild goats came to the edges of the rocks, looked down at the peaceable intruders a few moments; in surprise, and then bounded away to their heights.

As Margaret sat enjoying it all with the keen zest of one who, having a true taste for nature, had escaped to her wildest haunts from the irksome monotony of a palace, she gazed upwards to the deep blue sky, of which so narrow a space was visible, with an unwonted admiration of its purity; when suddenly, from the summit of the loftiest precipice in view, a large, stately bird rose upon the wing, and soared away with many a majestic sweep. She needed no one to tell her it was the mountain eagle; she almost fancied she heard the rush of his mighty wings, as he sprang forth on the breeze, and following him with an intense gaze, as he diminished to a seeming speck and vanished in the realms of upper air, she was unconscious of a commotion among the recumbent knights about her. When her strained eyes again rested on earth, she perceived that most of them had risen, and were looking towards the lower part of the defile. The Baron di Castiglione, too, had turned in the same direction, with the air of one listening intently; and presently a sound as of horsemen, ascending the rocky pass at

full speed, came upon her ear. The idea of an attack from banditti flashed across her mind, as she cast a hurried glance about the wild secluded spot; and rising, she clasped her little girl to her bosom, and advancing to the side of the Baron, stood in the centre of the grass plat. In another moment, two knights, mounted on black steeds, came rapidly into the pass, and on seeing the group before them, reined up suddenly and respectfully, remaining motionless in their saddles. The next instant, a third knight came dashing between them, on a superb white charger, glittering like his master with steel and gold; and as the princely figure galloped almost to her side, threw himself to the ground, and raised the vizor from his noble countenance, Margaret recognised her long absent husband, Charles of Durazzo!

When the first joy of meeting his wife and children was over, Charles turned to the Baron, and exclaimed hastily, "You have surprised me much. When your messenger came but now to tell me the Princess was here, I could scarce credit my ears. Why tarried you not in Rome?"

"I had no such orders."

"What! have you met no couriers? I sent two, with injunctions that if you had left the city, you should forthwith return thither, and await me."

“They have missed us then,” said the Baron;—
“it was the Princess’s pleasure to take the shorter road through the hills, and they, no doubt, expected to meet us in the plains.”

“It is unfortunate,” said the Prince; “I did not mean to welcome my wife to my canvass walls and rough camp-fare, when Rome has so many stately palaces, whose gilded doors would fly open to receive her.”

“I should better love the humblest tent under your banner,” whispered Margaret, “than the proudest palace in that city.”

Charles smiled upon her kindly, and laying his gauntleted hand on the head of his boy, who lost in admiration stood gazing up in his face, he added, “And here, too, is one who will love a soldier’s straw pallet better than the silken pillows of Naples!—To the camp, then, Baron; we will give these fair ladies as little cause as may be to repent their long journey; and they shall look upon a sight that may repay no small fatigue. They shall behold an army that a Prince may be proud to lead.”

It was now by the side of her husband, listening to his cheerful voice, and feeling that his guardian hand was on her palfrey’s bridle, that Margaret resumed her route, forgetting in the happiness of the moment that such a thing as doubt, fear, or sorrow existed.

The Baron di Castiglione rode near them, and to him Charles addressed much of his conversation, respecting the state of his troops, and the Venetian wars. In less than half an hour they emerged from the rocks and trees of the mountainous country, and, as they issued from the forest upon the brow of a hill, far as the eye could reach, extended a noble spectacle indeed. The champaign below them was green as an emerald, with many rills winding and glittering through the meadows; and every where were scattered the white tents of an extended camp. By the brook sides, in the fields, among the groves, the long lines stretched away to the right and left, distinctly visible by the light that yet came from the glowing west, where the sun had just sunk below the horizon. The shadows of twilight had indeed begun to gather over some of the deepest dells; but on their right, along the whole eastern horizon, glimmered a range of cloudlike forms, the summits of snow-topped mountains, gilded by the beams of that sun, which to the lower country had already set. Almost breathless with admiration, Margaret uttered an exclamation, which induced her husband to pause indulgently, a few moments, that she might enjoy the scene; and she could scarcely help sighing, when, as they trotted slowly down the green slope, the groves that soon overshadowed them shut the whole from her view.

New cause of wonder, however, arose as they entered the city of tents; where the cleanliness, order, and stillness that prevailed spoke well for the discipline of Charles's boasted army. Received with military honors at the lines, the little cavalcade was conducted through a long, wide street of tents, at the termination of which an illuminated pavilion glimmered through the closing dusk; and here the weary Margaret dismounted. Every possible arrangement had been hastily made for her comfort; she sunk exhausted upon the soft cushions, piled up for her couch; but though refreshments were brought her, the fever induced by fatigue and over excitement began to burn on her cheeks and throb in her pulse. Charles, in alarm, summoned the most experienced of her attendants, who prescribed rest and quiet; he passed softly from the pavilion, gave orders for profound stillness throughout the camp, and retired to a humbler tent in her vicinity. Even the centinel at her door remained motionless at his post, lest his footfall should disturb her slumbers; and long ere the usual hour, a midnight hush was upon those thousands of living and active human beings.

CHAPTER III.

UNWONTED noises roused the Princess early the next morning, but she awoke completely refreshed and restored ; and for a while, ere she summoned her attendants, lay endeavoring to collect her scattered ideas. As the events of the preceding day floated through her mind, a painful thought suddenly struck her ; and the more she reflected upon it, the more she wondered that in spite of her fatigue and indisposition, it had not occurred to her before. Not a word of inquiry respecting the Queen had escaped the lips of Charles ! He had shown no solicitude to hear of her health or her occupations ; he had not mentioned her, nor alluded to her. In vain Margaret strove to bring to mind some hasty question, some one word of loving recollection ; in vain she tried to extenuate such seeming want of interest in his noble benefactress, — to fancy that the joy of meeting his wife and children, or that military cares might have occasioned a brief forgetfulness of what was nevertheless near

his heart. Uncomfortable and perturbed, she rose betimes, and when the duties of her toilette were completed, sent a page to answer the inquiries which a messenger from Charles had already addressed to her women. The Prince was then occupied among his officers; but she soon heard his jocund voice at the door of her tent, and dismissing her attendants she hastened to meet him. He was already armed and prepared for the saddle; and joyfully observing the restored bloom on her cheek, he drew her forth, saying, — “Come out, my wife, and look at this stirring sight.”

It was so, indeed; the knoll, on which her pavilion stood, commanded a view of a large portion of the camp; but wherever she turned her eyes, it dropped at once from her sight, and in an instant the whole aspect of the field was changed as if by magic. In the distance, towards the south, the arms of the departing troops were seen gleaming through the trees, as they ascended the hills, which bounded the plain; and a large body of cavalry stood waiting at a short distance. As she came forth from the pavilion, the war-horse of Charles was led up by two grooms, who could with difficulty restrain the ardor of the noble animal, tossing his head and rearing under their grasp. His eye glanced fire as he heard the well known voice of his accustomed rider in the battle field; but Charles

hastily bade the men take him away. "I shall not ride Cæsar upon the march," said he; "I shall want him fresh for service. Bring me the Black Prince."

"That was the name our mother taught you to reverence. The brave English warrior befriended James of Minorca, and she never forgot it," said Margaret, scarce daring to look in her husband's face, as she ventured this remark.

He winced, however, for she felt a sudden slight motion of the arm on which she leaned; but without apparently having heard her, he exclaimed, "You will call me no true knight, Margaret, for deserting you as soon as you place yourself under my protection; but there are leaders among my troops, with whom it is necessary I should hold constant colloquy, and business, at present, demands every moment of my waking time. It will be better, therefore, that the good Baron di Castiglione resume his office, and guide you back through the hills again to Rome, while I march to the same point along the plains." Observing the tears gathering in Margaret's eyes, he added, — "I must needs head my troops, dearest; and it will be safer, pleasanter, and more fitting that you travel under a selected escort, than in company with my rough soldiery. In Rome we shall meet."

"It is hard to part again so soon," said Margaret, "but that is not all that disappoints me. I had something to say to you, Charles."

"And can you not say it briefly? — or is not that a woman's talent?" asked the Prince, gaily; "my body guard shall wait then a little for me; we will dash the faster through the dew, and overtake yon creeping infantry, in marvellous short space. What little harangue have you prepared, that makes you so pale? Surely there can be no boon which *you* dare not ask of me."

"I have no boon to ask," said Margaret, trembling; — "but do you know, Charles, — it seems to me strange that you have not inquired after the Queen!"

The Prince colored to the temples. — "Have I not indeed? Is it possible?" said he, "but you know I have scarce had time; — you were ill, last night, — in fact, we have hardly met as yet. She is well, — is she not?"

"Ah, Charles," exclaimed Margaret, "our mother would not thus have asked tidings of you! — It is of you she thinks, night and day! her absent husband, dearly as she loves him, is not more constantly present to her thoughts; and the color comes proudly to her cheek, when she hears you praised, as if you had indeed drawn your very existence from her! Could

you but have seen her, when the false rumor came, that you were slain in battle! She did not strive to soothe my anguish, for she shared it. Pale as marble, — speechless as a statue, — she sat hours by my couch, with the tears trickling down her cheeks, save when she laid her head on my pillow to mingle her groans and sobs with mine. Oh, my husband! — to think an orphan boy, like you, should have found maternal tenderness so fond, — and in so noble a being!”

Charles fixed his eyes on the ground; but Margaret waited in vain for a word. “How often I have longed to tell you of her devotion to your children; — how she trains up your son to look upon his father as the model of all things heroic and excellent; — how she bids him be as brave in the field, as wise in the council chamber, as generous to the unfortunate, — as true to those he loves!”

The Prince started impatiently. “The sun grows hot, Margaret,” said he, “you were better in the shade.”

“Then come in with me,” urged Margaret, holding him pleadingly by the hand; — “think how long it is since we have talked together, and how full my heart must be! Surely, if we are not to travel in company, you will not begrudge me one half hour, before you set out!” Margaret’s was the face, on which entreaty sits irresistible, and as her beseeching eyes

were fixed on him, he looked irresolute, yielded and reëntered the tent. "Now tell me, dearest," said she, striving to lift the heavy helmet from his head, — "when will you quit these weary wars? Your face is homewards now; are you not coming home to live tranquil and happy with us once more? I am afraid you will be spoiled, Charles; and forget mother, wife, and children."

"That cannot be!" exclaimed the Prince, with energy, — "I have the heart of a man still!"

"I believe it, Charles, — I believe it from the bottom of my soul! and no black calumny shall ever make me doubt your truth and fidelity," added Margaret, clasping her hands, as a bright look of confidence beamed over her face.

"Why," said the Prince, with a look of some perplexity, "why such an asseveration?"

"Oh, Charles!" replied she, — "I hardly dare tell you why. It has been upon my lips all this time, but I have not dared utter it. They have slandered you, my husband; I know not who; — but enemies of your fame have whispered the darkest insinuations against you; they have charged you with the blackest of crimes, — *ingratitude!* They have striven to make the noble Joanna herself believe you forgetful of the deepest and tenderest obligations, that could bind man to a fellow creature! — False, even to *her*, the mother of your desolate childhood."

The Prince started up impetuously, and as he walked about the tent, the veins in his forehead swelled with agitation.—“Who has done this?” exclaimed he; “whence came these tales?”

“I know not,” said Margaret; “I asked not; it was enough for me to declare them false; and I would have died in the cause, had it been needful. They say that base intriguing spirits abound in courts; but I thought that you, dearest, stood above suspicion, as above temptation. It was from the Queen’s own lips I heard the tale.”

“And yet she dismissed you safely and honorably, from her court! Did she make no effort to retain you,—nor my children,—as pledges of my faith? Then she doubts me not, noble, generous, angelic being that she is!”

Margaret burst into tears. “O Charles!” she ejaculated,—“could *she* but hear you! Come back to Naples with me, my husband; what need you of these troops? Leave them behind, and hasten with me to look once more on her beloved and beautiful face. Come to receive those benignant smiles, with which she always welcomed you; the holy blessing, which you used to say kept all wickedness away from you. Next week will be the anniversary of our wedding day;—let us keep it in the palace where she

smiled upon our childish affection ; — where she herself bade me love you till my dying day.”

Charles was deeply moved ; a tear even rolled down his manly cheek, as he looked upon the fair creature who clung to him. “ I am indeed bound by the heart-strings to her who bestowed on me such a wife, were there no other tie,” said he, in a low, sad tone, as if musing aloud. At that moment the curtained door of the tent was slowly drawn back, and the Prince looked up sternly, as if indignant at the intrusion ; but on seeing the person who stood there in silence, he changed countenance, and hastily disengaging himself from his wife, he seized his helmet from the cushion, replaced it on his brow, and left the tent with the stranger, without uttering another word.

Margaret remained immovable with surprise. As he stood with his back to the light, she had but faintly distinguished the face of the unbidden guest, — a tall monk, with a downcast eye and colorless cheek ; but the sudden paleness and abrupt departure of her husband left her completely bewildered. Ere she had recovered from her amazement, the ground beneath her feet shook with the tread of a large body of horse, sweeping by at full speed ; and in a moment more, a page appeared to announce that the Baron di Castiglione waited her orders. She hurried to look forth ; — the camp had entirely disappeared ; a few

heavy wagons were moving slowly from the field ; her own small band were already mounting ; and at a short distance, she perceived the party which had just passed galloping towards the hills. At their head she easily recognised the stately form of Durazzo, and by his side rode the monk. Slowly and sadly she withdrew, and as her women crowded into the tent to assist in the bustle of departure, she was unconscious of the dismay her aspect excited.

If the journey to meet her husband had appeared long to Margaret, the same route, retraced, was intolerably tedious. Surprise at his demeanor, a vague anxiety, impatience to be once more in his presence, where she still felt as if all doubt and fear must be dispelled, took from her the power of enjoying either the conversation of her companions, or the beauty of the scenery through which they passed. To find herself in Rome, little as she cared for its Papal honors, was now the earnest object of her wishes ; and on her last day's journey, as they ascended each hill, she gazed anxiously forward, in hopes of catching a distant glimpse of that city, whose fame was bruited over the world, and whose power lay on the invisible spirit of man. She dreamed not, however, that this mysterious power was yet to crush her best hopes of happiness ; that the influence of the tiara was to blight the remainder of a life, hitherto so free from

bitterness. Still less did she dream of the sad entrance she should make into its renowned streets.

The noontide halt was over, and the Baron had just given her the welcome assurance, that in four hours, she would be within the walls of the Eternal City, when one of the children's attendants came, with an anxious brow, to announce that the little Joanna was ill. The Princess hastened to her in alarm, and found the child reclining on the shoulder of her nurse, the rose-color on her cheek heightened to a feverish scarlet, and her eyes dull and glazed. She stretched her arms to her mother with a faint moan; Margaret took her at once, and on applying to her attendants found, to her dismay, that none knew what remedy to prescribe, or by what form of malady the patient was attacked. Nay, some of the more timid shrunk to a distance, and her quick ear caught the fearful word "contagion" among their stifled whispers. Claspings the little girl to her bosom, she ascended the litter, and crying to the Baron, "Rome! Rome! — with all speed to Rome!" she sat in speechless suspense. Her children had been blessed from birth with unusual health, and utterly inexperienced as she was in the symptoms or management of disease, her emotions, on witnessing the sufferings she could not relieve, were almost agonizing. On they went, with a speed which, at another

time, would have been unpleasing; but to her, it seemed as if they crept along the interminable way; and to her incessant inquiries, — “How far yet?” — the answers only brought disappointment. At last the domes of the city rose above the level of the Campagna, along the dusky horizon; but without one throb of lofty associations, — one glance at the objects which surrounded them as they drew nearer to the Mistress of the world, Margaret forgot every thing else, in the increasing distress of her child. As the shades of twilight descended, she fancied death already painted on the livid features she discerned more dimly; and was at last, hardly conscious that they had passed the Porta del Popolo, when they reached the threshold of a magnificent palace, appointed by the Pope himself for her reception.

The most skilful physicians of the day came at her summons. It was discovered that the little girl had not been well, since the night, when the Princess had passed almost incognita through Rome, in her haste to join her husband; and that the building, in which they had then slept, stood near the Lateran, recently discovered to have become so infected by the encroaching Malaria of the marshes, that during the summer months, it was abandoned to the insidious and invisible foe. The disease which had attacked the frame of the little Joanna, was pronounced a dangerous, malig-

nant fever ; and after despatching a messenger to hasten her husband, still on the march, Margaret gave herself up to that most wearing, yet sacred of duties, — a mother's patient, midnight watching by the couch of her suffering child. The solicitations of her attendants, — the recollection of her rank, — the danger to her health, — nothing could counteract the impulse of that common human nature, throbbing alike in the heart of the high and low ; and the wife of the poorest peasant, nursing her squalid babe on the Pontine fens, could scarcely have envied the wealthy, beautiful, admired Princess of Durazzo, as all night long, she counted the weary hours, — listened to the feeble moans of her child, — held the draught to its parched lips, and laid its restless head on that pillow, which, in palace or cottage, is ever the softest, — the bosom of maternal love.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER the departure of Margaret from Naples, the melancholy days of Joanna crept on, unmarked by any event distinct from the usual routine of her life. In the regular administration of her queenly duties, in the superintendence of many benevolent and public-spirited works which she had undertaken, in presiding over the court, which her own virtue and dignified deportment had rendered as remarkable for refinement as for magnificence, she sought to beguile the secret anxieties of her heart. Since the opening dawn of her life had been clouded by sorrows most peculiar, — by violent deaths or unlooked for treachery among her dearest friends, — she had ever worn an aspect of majestic pensiveness ; and the open smiles, which had forsaken her countenance at eighteen, had never returned to illumine its more mature beauty. Gentle and affable in her demeanor, however, her habitual gravity did not banish innocent mirth from those about her ; and she was loved,

almost to adoration, by those who came oftenest about her person. Yet none were admitted completely into her confidence;—the awe inspired by her rank and character was never dispelled by indiscreet communicativeness on her part; and not one of her most trusted nobility suspected how deeply the apprehension of coming evils, deadlier than all she had yet known, was now haunting her hours of meditation. When the warlike spirit of her adopted son had led him, in spite of her remonstrances, to seek distinction under the king of Hungary,—once her bitter foe,—she had felt the want of a masculine mind and chivalric arm to counsel or defend her. Driven by necessity once more to form connexions she had abjured, the duties which Charles had forsaken now devolved on a husband; and the unblemished, disinterested character of Prince Otho of Brunswick, suitable to her in age and accomplishments, did honor to her matronly judgment. It is of him, that the graceful pen of Joanna's female biographer writes thus. —“Without demanding the title of king, or arrogating any power to himself, this generous, brave, and amiable man won and deserved the entire affection of his Queen, and maintained her throne, for some time, in peace and security.” At this critical juncture, he was absent in the southern part of his dominions, where some symptoms of insur-

rection among the rough mountaineers of Calabria had required the check of his personal appearance. So vague had been the rumors, which had reached Joanna of the negotiations between Pope Urban, her implacable enemy, and Charles, her adopted son, that she forbore, as yet, to molest her husband with intelligence which she shrunk from believing.

She returned, one evening, from an excursion to visit the palace she was building under the brow of Posilipo. The romantic beauty of its situation, where its very foundations were laved by classic billows, had not been overlooked by her elegant taste; and while anxious to give occupation to the artificers, whom she had hitherto employed on churches and hospitals, she had designed it as a calm retreat for her declining years. In the present state of her spirits, she looked on the progress of the workmen with a sadness she could scarce conceal. Again and again, she cast back her eyes, as she rode from it, surrounded by a gay party of courtiers; and the question forced itself continually on her mind,—"Will it ever be completed? Shall I live to tread in its fair halls, and look from its windows over these blue waves? Or will some gloomy blight fall yet again across my path? Will my plans be frustrated, my spirits broken, my ever busy mind crushed by fresh sorrows? Then will the hand of the workman cease, the sound of labor be

hushed ; the lonely sea will murmur round the unfinished walls, the fisherman will hang his nets in its uncovered vaults, and the musing traveller shall pronounce it a sad memorial of the uncertainties that wait on all human schemes !”

She spurred her steed forward, at last, to escape these melancholy thoughts, and a temporary excitement revived her drooping spirits, as she sped along the delightful Mergellina ; the fleet Arabian, on which she was mounted, dashed over the firm wet sands, as if with a consciousness of enjoyment ; — the breeze, which in that region comes down from the hills in the afternoon, played with its bracing influences on her frame, and her whole train entered with zest into that most exhilarating pleasure, a gallop along a wide, smooth beach.

When she arrived at the private apartments of her palace in Naples, it was with an unwonted glow on her cheek, and a brightness in her eye, which spoke of her earlier and happier days. “ My ride has done me much service,” she said, as she drew off her silken glove, embroidered with gold, and turned to her private secretary, who waited her return with papers ; — “ and now I think these dull documents will not make my poor head ache, as of late.” She took a sealed packet from his hand, as he said something of “ a courier from Rome,” — changed countenance as she

looked at the superscription ; broke it open hastily, and casting her eyes over the brief contents, dropped the parchment, staggered a few paces, and fell, as if stunned, upon a couch. The confusion which ensued lasted but a few moments ; the alarm had hardly been given by her terrified secretary, when the recovering Queen roused herself, and standing up calmly, though the late brilliant hue of her complexion had fled, and her hand convulsively grasping the back of a chair, she bade her female attendants quit the apartment ; then directing the secretary to leave writing implements on the table, and see that couriers were in readiness to set out for Calabria, she dismissed him too. Motionless for a few moments after he left her, she gazed on the fatal packet which lay on the floor, as if it had been a scorpion, and then slightly spurning it with her foot, she murmured, — “ Man’s villainess I may scorn ! — when God deals with me, may I be resigned ! ” Her eyes rose devoutly to heaven, as she turned towards the table, where she seated herself and leaned her head upon her hand. Deep was the abstraction to which she yielded, and the groans, which at times escaped from her, showed how severe was her mental anguish ; but she at last seized the parchment, and with a trembling, but practised and rapid hand, traced the following epistle.

“My good and well beloved husband,

“The blow is struck! the throne totters beneath my feet, and I call to you for aid. Charles of Durazzo claims the crown of Naples—by right of the Pope’s investiture! His army hovers on the borders of my kingdom,—and though my heart be pierced, I will yield nothing to injustice and ingratitude. Tarry not among the banditti of the mountains; for bolder though baser robbers are in the plains, and will soon beset the gates of Naples.”

She sealed her concise summons, despatched it, and with a brow full of lofty determination descended to the apartment where some of the bravest and wisest among her nobility awaited her. They were thunder-struck at the intelligence she had to communicate; they broke forth in righteous indignation at the viper she had cherished; and she alone was composed and self-possessed. She was forced to remind them, that they met not to dwell on the past, but to take counsel for the future; and she proceeded to set forth her resolution to resist the aggression of Durazzo, sanctioned as it was by Urban himself. A spirited but temperate and dignified reply was sent to the Manifesto of Charles; and arrangements were made to summon aid from her dominions in Provence, and to have the city in a posture of defence, with all practicable speed.

Each Baron, as he left the presence of his Queen, vowed fidelity with purse, sword, and heart's blood, to her person and rights. The lamps suspended along the galleries waned in their sockets, as Joanna passed to her stately chamber; the stars waned in the heavens before sleep visited her aching eyes.

CHAPTER V.

WE return, for a short space, to the misguided Charles, Prince of Durazzo. He had left his wife abruptly, at the head of a strong party of horse, to overtake the main body of his troops, marching steadily south. In silence he rode on for some time, exchanging not a word with his immediate companion, — a monk, whose unusual sallowness of complexion, emaciation of figure, and austerity of aspect marked him as one, who strictly observed the rules of his order. The black robe and wide sleeves of the Dominican showed him to be a member of that powerful brotherhood, whose zeal in the cause of Papal supremacy, and success in attaining the office of Confessors to kings and princes, had given them an influence over the destinies of men as unsuspected as it was terrible. It was in this unscriptural and unhallowed relation that Father Matteo stood toward the young prince, by whose side he rode; the keeper of his conscience, the master of his secrets, the ruler

of a towering spirit, which thought to be controlled by no earthly power. Without an effort to rouse Charles from his unwonted taciturnity, without the least apparent curiosity as to its cause, he kept his large gloomy eyes fixed on the ground before him, in a cold abstraction, which contrasted strongly with the erect and open countenance of Durazzo, on whose features worked a constant succession of strong emotions. More than once, the Prince suddenly drew up, as from an irresistible impulse, and seemed about to accost his companion; but a glance at that stern, pale face appeared to have the power of checking the half uttered remark; and muttering an ejaculation, he drove the spurs impatiently into his steed, forcing him into an idle caracole, that only betrayed the moodiness of his master's mind. They reached, at last, a grove of chestnuts, where the shade of those beautiful trees spread like an awning over the soft grass; and Charles, as if his resolution were taken, gave some directions to his officers, and then, making a sign to the monk to follow him, rode away among the trees on their left, leaving the troops to pass on without them. In a few minutes they came to the brow of a cliff, and looked down upon a little quiet lake, hidden among the wooded hills. The sun was not yet high enough to shine on its smooth surface, and a tranquillity and freshness as of the

early morning lingered on its shores. No human habitation was in sight; but on a promontory, which jutted into the water, stood the ruins of a small, ancient temple, classically graceful in its proportions, and beautiful even in decay.

In this still seclusion, Charles paused, listened, and looked around; the heavy tramp of his troops came sounding indistinctly along the ground; the squirrel chirped as he leaped among the branches over head; and the cry of the heron rose from the reedy border of the little bay below them; but there was no sign of intrusion from the approach of man. He turned upon his companion, and with a visible effort to speak in an unfaltering tone, he exclaimed, — “Father Matteo! the die is not yet cast. It is not too late to pause and consider the dark paths I am about to tread!”

The monk made no reply; he stroked the neck of his horse, with his bony, gloveless hand, and a withering sneer passed over his lips, but he did not even lift his eyes to the speaker.

“No, pursued the Prince, “it cannot be too late. So secret have been our transactions, — so desperate is the deed contemplated, — so madly have I been hurried on of late! — I will, — I must pause to reflect yet again! There are moments when I am alone at midnight, in which things wear an aspect so

different ! — it seems to me, holy father, that whether I prosper or fail, in this undertaking, I must be a miserable, — miserable man. At one time, I feel that I am lured forward by the glittering form of an ambition, as glorious as becomes my princely race ; then it seems as if the base goblin figures, Covetousness, — Fanaticism, — Treachery, beckoned me on to my destruction. Now, methinks, the voice of God is in my ear ; — then, the horrid whispers of a fiend ! Father ! it is dreadful.”

“ Is there nothing *more* dreadful ? ” asked the Dominican ; then raising his voice above the sepulchral tone, which seemed to have awed the Prince for a moment, he slowly pronounced the words, — “ Thy faith broken with man, — the commands of the Holy Church mocked, — the drawn sword basely sheathed, — thy warlike fame tarnished, — the sparkling crown withdrawn from thy unworthy brows, — a woman’s foot upon thy neck, — the derision of nations on thy inglorious retreat, — thy secret schemes made public and scoffed at, because thou hadst not courage to carry them through, — thy life dragged out in ignoble obscurity, — thy death a passage to — eternal perdition ! — Charles of Durazzo ! how likest thou the picture ? ”

The face of Durazzo, red and pale by turns, spoke volumes ; but mastering the internal struggle, he ex-

claimed, "It is dark as midnight! I know that I am entangled almost beyond hope of extrication; that to advance or retreat must be alike desperate; that my worldly fortunes and happiness are already staked, and cannot escape the dreadful jeopardy; but, keeper of souls! I adjure you by all your holy vows, — by your regard for the salvation of a fellow creature, who has given you the direction of his conscience; — by your reverence for God, and the holy Virgin, and the blessed company of saints and martyrs, — tell me one thing truly; — am I *right*? am I *right*? I ask you!"

A sudden gleam of triumph shot from the eye of the monk, as he heard this testimony to his still unshaken power; but it was gone in an instant, and his thin lips were compressed in a frigid and haughty silence.

Charles laid his hand almost imploringly on the coarse, black sleeve, and went on in a choked voice. — "Tell me what crime can be fouler than ingratitude; — the very word is heavy on my tongue! — Ingratitude to her, who took me under the shelter of her palace, when I was an orphan boy; and it is from that very palace I would drive her, now manhood has made me independent of her protection. I know her queenly spirit; she will not yield her natural rights without a struggle, and my hand must be raised

against her in paricidal violence. My father was her foe, and she forgave him. He fell by the hand of an assassin, and she took me, a beardless, helpless boy, scarce numbering twelve summers, to a home she made always happy. O, holy priest! I tell you my manhood will wear an indelible stain, if I wrong that more than mother! — I told you so, when you first came to me with the tempting propositions of our most holy Father. I told you so in amazement and indignation; and how you have lulled those honorable scruples, — how you have alternately lured and goaded me on to this wretched pass, I know not. The struggle was long and fierce, you well know, and now it begins afresh. Priest, — I doubt! I doubt! banish these misgivings if you can. Prove, — prove to me, that the deeds on which I am rushing are not crimes, — base, unnatural, monstrous crimes!”

It was in tones of agony that the Prince spoke. The perspiration stood on his forehead, and his eyes were fixed almost wildly on the monk, who had the advantage of perfect self-possession. Interlacing his emaciated fingers, clasping his hands to his breast, and raising his eyes to heaven, he seemed for a few moments lost in holy meditation; his lips then moved, and as audible sounds began to escape from them, the concluding words of a Latin prayer were articulated solemnly and distinctly. He then bent his pene-

trating eyes on the Prince, with a gaze so long and fixed, that it became embarrassing; and in a tone, unwontedly gentle and tender, said, — “My son! to recede is guilt; to pause is guilt; to hesitate is guilt; — penance and absolution can alone wash away this day’s errors. I have warned you; the consequences of a change in your purposes will be terrible; I cannot screen you from them. Worldly shame will hurry you to an ignoble grave; the malediction of the Church will blight and blast you forever; and for what will you brave all this? Are you a man, — that the smile or the tear of a woman’s eye can thus work on the noblest purposes of your soul? Are you a prince, — that when a fair kingdom is at your disposal, and the arm of the Church is stretched forth to place you on an independent throne, you prefer to remain a vassal, because a woman has, this morning, whispered old tales of your nursery days in your ear! For shame, belted knight! — for shame, armed warrior.” Then changing his tone to one of deep and awful denunciation, — “Joanna must fall! — she that brought you up at her footstool, to be the plaything of her idle hours, and her bravo when you should wear a sword; she who would have kept you to glitter at her court, or fight at her bidding under a husband’s banner, must come down from a height that dizzies her female brain. The realms of Naples are

too fair and powerful to be longer swayed by the caprices of a woman. God hath given to his Viceroy on earth the power to crown and uncrown; to distribute sceptres among the children of men, not according to the idle chances of birth, but in obedience to the nobler laws of the general good. She, on whose fame lie indelible stains of evil report, whom the wrath of Heaven has pursued with incessant calamity, must sparkle no longer in the constellation of crowned heads. Among the courts of Europe, hers must fade with its boasted lustre. Her hour is come; and she must tell her beads in the silent cell of a recluse, and wear the stones of some secluded monastery with her humbled knees. Some bold heart, brave hand, and manly brow shall win and wear the prize suspended aloft. Prince of Durazzo, whose shall it be?—thine or another's? Choose!"

Charles sprung madly from his horse, and dashed himself on the ground, at the foot of a noble tree, his plate armor rattling as he fell prostrate. He remained plunged in a mental conflict the most severe; while the stately monk, drawing himself up to his full height, sat composedly watching the victim, as he struggled in the toils that were woven so invisibly but invincibly about him. The master-key had again been touched, and with a master's hand. Ambition,—the burning desire to exchange his ducal coronet for a

kingly crown, — to step forward and signalize himself among the potentates of Europe, the peer, perhaps, of Louis of Anjou, Regent of France, — all worked within the compass of one human breast to accomplish his fate, and that of thousands linked with it. The bare idea of seeing a boon so glorious, snatched from him, — enjoyed by another, roused the jealousy of his nature, and made each better impulse of generosity, honor, and gratitude seem like the sickly fancies of some fever fit.

He rose at last, but languidly, as if the struggle had taken the strength from his joints ; and as he sat for a few moments with downcast looks, his fingers played with the moss and wild-flowers growing about the roots of the old tree ; he even tore them up unconsciously, but his thoughts were not with those sweet, innocent objects of his boyish admiration. The hectic spot on his cheek showed that the passions of manhood were racking him within, and the big tears rolled slowly down his face. As the priest seemed resolved on a stern silence, he was not roused till a swelling breeze brought the faint blast of a trumpet from some distant winding of the road. His horse, grazing negligently beside him, lifted his head and pawed the earth at the well known sound, and Charles, starting up, vaulted into the saddle. As he turned to regain the road, the hand of Father Matteo

was laid firmly on his bridle. "My son," — said he. The Prince looked up, and met those penetrating eyes, bent upon him with their darkest austerity. "We must have no more of these scenes! no more faltering! no more baby-talk! The die is cast; — and your *soul* is the stake for which you play! Should the birds of the air carry the tale of this day's irresolution to the footstool of Urban!" —

Charles impatiently strove to dash forward, but the grasp of the monk on his bridle was not to be shaken off; and his horse reared so violently as almost to unseat the rider. "Whither so fast?" asked Father Matteo; "back, — to play the hireling of a Hungarian?"

"Forward," shouted Charles, — "to Rome, — to Naples, — to a bloody grave, please God!" — and bursting from the priest, he galloped with frantic speed, in the direction of his troops, and soon disappeared among the trees. His confessor sat gazing after him, a moment; and a smile of most unchristian exultation played again over his features. "The work speeds," he murmured to himself, — "and he of the tiara shall say he chose well his instrument. Charles! men speak of thy virtues; — but thou hast one passion, which a master spirit shall use to exterminate them, and work his own ends. Ambition! — ambition! — the crown for him, — and for me, —

what lures me on, but the scarlet hat!—and the hope of vengeance!” His head sunk on his breast, and he followed the Prince at a more moderate pace.

CHAPTER VI.

ONCE more, we revisit the beautiful city of Naples, and her, whom its populace love, even at this day, to call "our Queen Joanna." But we pass over an interval of some weeks, since, struck to the heart by the treachery of Durazzo, she stifled the feelings of the woman, and prepared for the duties of the Queen. Lofty and calm, she betrayed none of her secret grief, and showed no irritability or hastiness of temper. She listened coolly, when her officers came to consult with her, deliberated wisely, but acted with decision; while to all her immediate attendants, the melancholy sweetness of her voice and manner had something in it so touching, that they were often melted into tears in the midst of their most ordinary intercourse. The panic among her women was indeed great, and not without cause.

Charles, expecting no acquiescence in his demands, and fully prepared to act, had marched with all speed upon Naples; Joanna had retreated into the Castell

Nuovo, and had immediately ascended its ramparts. Lying on the east of the city, which rises like an amphitheatre from the north side of its celebrated bay, the walls of the Castle were washed on one side by the sea; and thither she betook herself, fixing a long and anxious gaze on the hazy line, where sky and water met; but not a speck appeared. The galleys from Provence were probably still ploughing their way through distant tracts of the Mediterranean. She went to another part of the Castle, and looked eastward. The dust rising in clouds above the vineyards showed that Otho was advancing, with all possible speed, from Calabria; but alas! too late. Between him and his unfortunate wife, the troops of Durazzo were pouring into the streets of Naples; and it was only tantalizing to watch his approach. Still, however, she stood, with breathless interest, her eyes fixed on the spectacle; till an officer of her household came to her with every mark of haste and agitation.

"The gates," he exclaimed, "the gates of the Castle are beset by fugitives. We have closed them, but the cry is terrible. The wretches are flying before the sword of the enemy!"

"Admit them," replied the Queen; "admit them instantly."

"May it please your Majesty," said an aged seneschal, "it will be your destruction; they bring famine with them as surely as they enter these walls."

"How," asked the Queen, "have we no food? Did I not give orders, three days since, that the Castle should be stocked for seven months?—Was I not obeyed?"

"To the letter," returned the old man, one of the most trusted of her personal attendants;—"your officers and your servants have done your bidding; and the provisions in the Castle will last its present inmates full seven months; but we must have no more mouths to consume them."

The Queen hesitated; the distant cries of the populace reached her, and one of her Barons came hastily upon the wall. "Let me pray your Majesty to withdraw; one of the apartments by the sea will be more retired and quiet."

"Quiet!" said she, with a tone of mournful surprise; "what have I to do with quiet? Is this an hour for Joanna of Naples to seek ease and tranquillity? Why should I retire?"

"Because," replied the Baron, "the people at the gate are almost frantic with terror; their shrieks fill the air; it must distress you, for you cannot afford them the slightest aid."

"I hear them! I hear them calling on my name!" exclaimed Joanna.

"They do, indeed;" replied the Baron; "they seem to invoke you, as they would their saints. Let me implore your Majesty to leave the walls."

The tumult increased. "Are the gates strong?" asked the seneschal.

"As adamant," returned the Baron. "I bade the soldiers use no violence to drive the poor creatures back on the enemy; women and children can never burst such barricades."

"Holy Virgin!" cried the Queen, "I cannot bear it. Let me see,—let me speak to them."

The Baron threw himself respectfully before her,—"I conjure your Majesty to abstain. It may wring your heart, but it can do no good; they cannot—they must not be admitted."

"Luca di Battista!" said the Queen, "stand back!"

She uttered these words gently, but with a tone of decision. He yielded instantly, and with a dejected air and anxious brow followed his royal mistress to a small apartment, above the great gate of the citadel. This was one of the five fortresses by which Naples was strengthened, and seemed proof against assault. No sooner did the Queen present herself at the window, which looked down into the thronged square, than the tumult redoubled; and for a moment, she shrunk back, and hid her face in her hands. It was, indeed, a startling sight. The throng consisted principally of women and children; the withered faces of the aged,—the ghastly ones of the sick,—all were

upturned to her. Arms were stretched out imploringly, and every voice uttered her name, mingled with all those piteous phrases of entreaty, in which the Italian tongue abounds. In vain she attempted to address them; as they looked up to her, standing in simple white raiment, without one regal ornament about her person, recognised for their Queen only by her noble air and well known countenance, it seemed as if they beheld in her some blessed female saint, who could save them from destruction, by a single exertion of superhuman power.

Her gestures, at last, obtained a momentary hush. She was about imploring them to attempt their escape to another fortress, stating why she could not shelter them in the *Castell Nuovo*, when the silver tones of her voice were drowned in a shrill cry, which rose from the outskirts of the throng. In a moment, the whole crowd was again in motion, those at a distance pressing towards the drawbridge, that crossed the moat, against those nearest the gate, until the struggle and crush became tremendous. The Queen and her attendants saw too plainly the cause of the disturbance from their elevated position. Overlooking the heads of the people, their view extended down a long street; and at its termination the flashing of swords showed a furious conflict going on. Some of the citizens were defending themselves vigorously, as

they retreated towards their helpless wives and children; but it was evident that their force was inefficient, and that the mounted soldiers of Durazzo were driving them in triumphantly. No sooner did the unhappy wretches, at the gate, become aware of this fact, than their agonizing cries again rent the air. "Our good Queen! Our blessed Queen! have mercy on us! We shall be cut to pieces! For the love of the Holy Virgin, save us!"

The heart of woman could bear it no longer. Joanna turned suddenly, with tears rolling down her cheeks, to her officers, and bade them open the gates. They hesitated; but a momentary anger flashed from her eyes, as she repeated her order, — "Luca di Battista! descend and see that those gates be unbarred to my people! shall I stand here and behold them slaughtered like sheep? — Admit them, or I will give my own neck to the swords of yonder cut-throats!"

The nobleman obeyed her in melancholy silence; and as the work of unclosing the huge double gates occupied some moments, the tumultuous throng heard with impatience the clang of the dropping bars and grating bolts; and when, at last, the doors were seen to move slowly inwards, the rush was dreadful. The shrieks of the bruised; the stifled cries of those who were thrown down and trampled upon; the con-

fusion within, where the unhappy creatures scattered themselves in every direction, — some still pale with terror, hardly realizing their safety, — some flushed and heated with the struggle, — some crying wildly for those they had lost in the press, — all produced a bewildering effect on the mind of the Queen. She stood a long time immovable and almost breathless. At last a few bloody stragglers from the conflict came flying up the street, hotly chased by the enemy. There was barely time to admit them also, while volleys of arrows from a body of archers, whom Luca di Battista had stationed on the walls for the purpose, kept back the pursuers, till the gates were again closed and secured.

Then, and not till then, the Queen drew a long breath, and turning from the window, looked for a moment at those about her, with an expression of despair. “Could I have done otherwise?” said she. None answered, and the old seneschal alone shook his head, sadly, and she passed into the gallery, which conducted to her own apartments, leaving consternation in the little group behind.

Before night, a strict investigation was made by order of the Queen; and it was ascertained that, swarming as the fortress now was with human beings, the provisions it contained would barely enable her to hold out one month. Before that period

should have elapsed, success might crown the arms of Otho; or the expected aid from Provence might arrive; and leaning on these two chances, she was now condemned to that trial most wearing to the nerves, a period of helpless inaction and cruel suspense. Durazzo occupied the city; her husband immediately laid siege to him; but though she could distinguish the camp of that brave warrior, beyond the walls, and was aware of the frequent skirmishes, going on between the parties, she found it impossible to open a communication with him. The difficulty of enforcing attention to the rules her forethought had laid down, and securing a wise abstemiousness among the motley population of the Castell Nuovo, gave her officers incessant perplexity within its walls. Her own table was spread with the absolute parsimony which circumstances made needful, and she herself underwent a perpetual fasting penance, setting an example of cheerful submission to privation; yet each day brought to her accounts of the alarming diminution in the public stock of provisions, and the necessity of lessening the scanty allowance doled out to the people.

Three long weeks passed on; day by day the walls were lined, before sunrise, with unhappy beings, straining their eyes seaward, to catch a glimpse of the hoped for succors from their Queen's French

dominions, or striving to ascertain on which side success lay, in the daily conflicts between Otho and Durazzo. The latter showed little disposition to assault the Castell Nuovo; the strength of its fortifications, defended by skilful archers, made him unwilling to waste the blood of his soldiers, while sure, from the circumstances of the case, that his powerful ally, Famine, would eventually give him a bloodless victory; and his immediate attention was engrossed by the harassing attacks of his own besieger. He contented himself with frequently summoning the Queen to surrender;—and she at last felt that a dreadful alternative was before her. She *must* surrender,—or feel that she had brought a cruel and lingering death on some hundreds of innocent fellow-beings.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the mean time, Margaret remained at Rome, watching unremittingly over her little charge, whose spirit hovered for days on the verge of death; apparently about to quit its tabernacle of clay, yet still lingering as if yielded a little longer to the prayers of maternal fondness. The instincts of her heart had led Margaret to forget every other possible evil in the dreaded calamity of bereavement. Even the mysterious delay of her husband was, to her mind, almost satisfactorily explained, when her attendants assured her, that business of the most pressing nature had led him back to Lombardy. She questioned not the truth of their statements; her whole soul was absorbed in the conflict between life and death, carried on beneath her eye; and as the superstition of the age led her to vow wealth untold to the altars of that holy Mother, whose beautiful character and attributes shone like the morning star on the night of her sorrow, she felt the force of the loveliest delu-

sion that ever mocked an aching heart. Trusting in the power of that sweet and gentle Being to call back her darling from the threshold of the tomb, and unconscious that there was, in her own nature, a glorious principle of resignation, which could extract the bitterness from all affliction, and fit her to bear that which it was now intolerable to contemplate, she prayed unceasingly for one specific object, the restoration of her little Joanna to health. At last the unskilful pharmacy of that age was no longer baffled by the fierce disease; it was plain that the yet innocent soul of the patient was not to seek those realms of kindred purity, where temptation could never come nigh, nor sin pollute it; it was to bear its terrible probation on earth. Alas! could the mother, whose tears of rapture bathed the creature she deemed rescued by her prayers, have seen the curtain of futurity raised, and Joanna the Second of Naples performing her disgraceful part amid its ignominious events!

Brief, however, was the transport of that hour, in which her physicians announced that the child would live. Margaret had returned from the neighboring chapel, whither she had hurried to pour out the overflowing gratitude of her soul; and she stood gazing on the emaciated object of her tenderness, when her reverie was interrupted by a benediction, uttered in a

deep tone, by some one behind her. She turned and beheld the Dominican standing in the doorway, with whom her husband had left her so abruptly, at their last interview. She did not recognise him, however, nor did the idea of his identity with that unwelcome person recur to her, till he announced himself as the Father Matteo da Villani, — the confessor of Charles of Durazzo. Then indeed she clasped her hands with a mingled emotion of joy and terror, as she exclaimed, “And whence come you holy father? from him, — my beloved husband?”

“Even so,” returned the monk.

“And how fares he? — Why comes he not hither? When shall I see him again?”

“He sends greeting by me, to his most noble lady, and asks tidings of the health of his child; and prays that if her sickness pass away, you will come to him with all convenient speed.”

Worn out as Margaret was with fatigue and anxiety, this fresh access of joy was received in eloquent silence. She folded her hands, and raised her eyes to a niche in the wall, where a lamp burnt before an image of the Virgin, — an image before which she had so often kneeled, during her late cruel vigils. It was some moments before she found words to express her eagerness to rejoin her husband, once more, whenever the health of her child should be suffi-

ciently restored; — “but you see!” she added, pointing to the cadaverous countenance of her patient.

Father Matteo cast a cold glance on the half inanimate object, and said, “It is well. My errand to Rome was not of this; but coming on business with his Holiness, I likewise bore the message of your husband. When it is fitting, he will look for you in Naples; meantime, I return thither to-morrow, and ” ——

“Naples! — said you?” interrupted the Princess, — “my husband in Naples? I heard you not rightly.” She looked at her attendants in amazement, and their downcast, confused countenances excited her surprise still farther. “What is this mystery? Why have I been deceived?” inquired the Princess with increasing vehemence; “they told me he was in Lombardy.”

“I know not what they may have told you, nor wherefore they have blistered their tongues with falsehood,” resumed the monk, calmly; “but I acquaint you with the truth. He is in his *home*, — in the fair city of Naples.”

A suspicion now broke on the mind of Margaret, and she faintly asked, — “What doth he there, sir Priest?”

“He contends for the crown, which God’s Vicerent hath given him, and besieges the dethroned Joanna, in her citadel.”

The unhappy Princess heard not the concluding words; there was a ringing in her ears; the room seemed to turn round with a wavering motion, and muttering, — “Is he a villain?” she would have swooned heavily on the floor, if her attendants had not caught her as she fell. The monk staid not to look on the sufferings of her whom he had felled with a word; but glided in the confusion out of the palace, and with a rapid foot, sped towards the hill of the Vatican.

It was long ere sense returned to the Princess; and when at last the indistinct recollection, that something dreadful had befallen her, stole on her mind, she eagerly uttered the name of her child, and looked towards the well-known couch, where all her anxieties of late had centered. Alas! a few more throbs of the reviving pulse, and memory performed her wonted functions too faithfully! The dreadful conviction of unworthiness in him she best loved, — the idea of the sufferings endured by her, whom she regarded as a mother, and a model of female excellence, — by turns took possession of her imagination. Her frame, exhausted by long watchings and recent cares, was not prepared to endure this new and more

intense agony of mind; and before day-light, her alarmed attendants had summoned the physicians again to the palace, to exercise their skill on the unfortunate Princess of Durazzo. A consuming fever had prostrated her so entirely, that her own life hung by a thread, while the child, she had nursed with such tribulation of soul, lay breathing still feebly in a neighboring apartment.

The short Italian twilight was already descending, when Father Matteo hurried from the lonely Palazzo San Carlo; but almost the whole extent of the city lay between him and the hill of the Vatican. The moon rose as he crossed the Tiber, and when he stood at length in one of the gardens attached to the palace, — even then venerable with time, — the fountain, by which he paused, showered drops of silver into its basin beneath her beams. The massy pile of buildings, on which he gazed, was already a collection of palaces rather than a single symmetrical edifice, cumbersome, gloomy, and inconvenient. The glories of the coming century had not dawned upon it; when, under the magnificent Julius II., its halls began to glow with the creations of a Raphael's imagination; when Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting held counsel together, how they should render it most worthy to be the earthly residence of Him, whose empire was not of earth alone. The genius of Mi-

chael Angelo had not yet suspended, between heaven and earth, that dome over the neighboring Cathedral, which should be the admiration of future ages; the long line of Pontiffs had not yet risen, who should gather splendor after splendor round this favored spot, until it became what the astonished traveller now finds it, — a wilderness of wonders. But the new sanctity which was attached to it, since the sacred Conclave had assembled within its walls, an arrangement of recent date, made it solemn in the eyes of all true Catholics; while the power of Urban VI., cruelly and perfidiously exercised, lent to his gloomy residence no attractions in the eyes of the young and gay. The stillness of death brooded over it; the part of the building, which the monk had approached, overlooked the garden with its long ranges of windows; but no one sat there to look forth on the moonlight, to enjoy the evening breeze and the fragrance of the orange blossoms. Here and there along the garden walks, silently glided the figures of some holy brethren, disappearing like ghosts in the deep shadows of the trees, with steps as stealthy as if pacing the cloisters of a Carthusian convent. The lonely owl, in the Coliseum, hooting as the moon-beams looked into his ivied retreat, could scarce have inspired a more mournful sense of desolation, than was awakened by the hum of the populous city,

coming so faintly on the ear, with the dash of the solitary fountain. It seemed as if the world, with all its living bustle and innocent pleasures were indeed shut out from the haunt of religion. But the religion of those days did not teach that worldly cares and pleasures may be disarmed and sanctified by the spirit we may carry into them; or that to conquer temptation is better than to exclude it,—if exclusion be possible.

Father Matteo paused to take breath, after his long and hurried walk; and leaning against the trunk of a tree, he watched the palace with some anxiety. At last a glimmer appeared at a window; it passed on to another and another; and the figures of a few attendants, bearing lights, preceded and followed the form of a tall aged man, as they passed along an extensive gallery. "It is he," murmured the monk; "he goes to his private closet to await me; and this night I must sound the depths of that crafty bosom. He that deals with Urban must tread warily, for yonder dark chamber holds uneasy furniture for the limbs of those he loves not. They say the creaking of the rack disturbs some men, more than the shrieks of the tortured trouble his ruthless spirit."

He again drew the cowl over his face, and approached a low door, in an angle of the buildings, which was opened at his knock. He passed along

many passages, leaving others on either hand, through one of which he distinguished, far in the distance, the massy balustrade of that ancient grand staircase, over which had passed the footsteps of Charlemagne, and beside it, the equestrian statue of Constantine the Great, standing dimly seen and majestic, beneath the lamps of the entrance hall. His course, however, was to the more private recesses of the palace; yet even there, the presence of the Pope's body guard showed a dread of danger, most natural in one who had been raised to power in a popular sedition, and whose claim must needs be as insecure as unjust. The monk cast not a glance on the stolid countenances of these automata; nor a thought on the incongruity, which placed armed men round the Head of the Church; but pressed forward, till he found himself admitted into a small apartment, scantily furnished.⁴³

Before him stood a heavy marble table, covered with scrolls of parchment; and in a cumbrous arm chair beside it, without canopy or ornament of any kind, was seated a stern old man. His complexion was dark and bilious; every line of his countenance strongly marked; his forehead high and square; and above it rose a round, close cap of dark velvet. The tiara was of recent introduction, and used then, as indeed at this day, only on public occasions. Not a symptom of the extravagance, which then inundated

the civilized world had found its way into the Papal palace; neither gems nor gold glittered about the person of that stern denouncer of luxury, — Urban VI.; and the very lamp, which was suspended from the ceiling over his table, was of iron. This affectation of simplicity corresponded ill with the number of valuable parchments, scattered about the room; a number which, in those days, was profusion; but he who had been distinguished as the learned archbishop of Bari had not forgotten his pride of erudition; so various are the forms worn by that most insidious of human passions.

There was one person more present; a young man of slight figure and mild aspect, who sat apart, as if waiting the pleasure of a superior. The attention of the Pontiff seemed absorbed by the illuminated manuscript volume, over whose purple vellum pages he was poring; the monk stood unnoticed; and though, from time to time, he made slight movements to attract the eye of Urban, he dared not approach the table. At last the youth spoke in a low voice, and the haughty prelate, looking up, coldly saluted the new-comer, and demanded the tidings from Naples.

“I have left it in the hands of Durazzo,” replied the monk; “and though the Queen still holds out, the Castell Nuovo is rather her prison than her fortress. She never can issue from it but as a state-prisoner.”

“And Otho?” asked the Pontiff; “his troops beleaguer Naples, we have heard.”

“It is so,” answered Father Matteo; “but to no purpose. Famine wastes the flesh of the wretches, whom Joanna’s folly admitted within her walls, and the sword of her husband avails her little. A few of her nobles deserted her on the arrival of a Prince, whose claims were announced to be sanctioned by heaven itself; and as I came, by stealth, through the troops of Otho, there I found disloyal scruples, working in the minds of many.”

“It is well, — it is well!” exclaimed the Pope, his sullen eye sparkling for an instant. “On such ground I plant my foot. The power of the Church rests on public opinion; I have sworn to myself that no tittle of the rights claimed by the most noble of my predecessors, — Gregory VII., — shall be wrested from my hands; and Princes must know, past all doubt, by what tenure their bauble sceptres are held. This woman, who disputes the authority of the Holy See, and cleaves to Anti-Pope, — how stands the affection of your Prince towards her?”

The monk hesitated somewhat, before he answered; — “It is still strong.”

“How!” cried the prelate; “he wars upon her, — he keeps good faith with us, doth he not?”

“Aye ; so long as the skilful hand is on the bridle, he will not dart from the course ; but I may not conceal from your Holiness, that he hath given me much trouble, at times.”

“Say on ; open this man’s heart before me ; I must know with what instruments we have to work.”

As he spoke, the Pontiff rested his head on his hand, and fixed his searching eye on the monk, who felt under it the consciousness that he was, himself, subjected to the keenest scrutiny. He went on calmly, however ; — “My trouble with the hot-headed Prince hath arisen from many fond fancies he cherishes concerning the gratitude due to the Queen of Naples and the obligations of his youth. He is brave to heroism, generous and open, full of what men call noble feelings and good impulses ; — but ductile, unsteady, and devoured by ambition.”

“He is the man I thought him,” said Urban ; “he is the man we want.”

“I believe it,” replied the monk ; “but great as are his reverence for the church of Rome, his belief in the infallibility and supremacy of the Holy See, his dread of its denunciation, and strong as is his thirst for power, there are counteracting principles in his nature that must yet be crushed, before we can rely upon him. A single interview with his wife in

Lombardy, if I had not cut it short, would have undone all my labor."

"Hath she such influence?" asked Urban, knitting his brows. "She must be disposed of."

"She is so; I have no fear from that quarter, for the present; for I came upon her, when already half dead with fatigue and anxiety, and when I told her, with intentional abruptness, the part her husband plays at Naples, she dropped as if smitten by a thunderbolt. She will not cajole the soft heart of Durazzo very speedily, for, if I mistake not, she will be little able to thrust herself among the counsels of men, till the purposes of your Holiness are completed. It is from Joanna herself,—from the sorcery that she exercises over all who approach her,—that we must keep this warrior. His wife but spoke to him of the Queen, and his firmest resolutions dissolved like vapor in the sunbeams. What effect will the aspect—the words—the reproaches—the tears of the Queen herself have upon him? It was your pleasure, as to my management on this point, I came to know."

Urban's countenance grew darker and darker. "Is the faith of Charles pledged to you, in behalf of my nephew here?" asked he.

"It is; as surely as he mounts the throne of Naples, so surely will he put the Count Buttillo in possession of the domains he hath promised. I have not

a doubt whether he will keep faith with your Holiness in this matter. Let him but conquer the feelings, which plead in behalf of Joanna, and the work is done; he is ours forever. The sole obstacle we have to overcome is in his devoted attachment to that woman. If that is not wrought upon by herself, or any other subtle enemy to our plans, he will go all lengths. Yet she has many friends; and giving out, as she does, that your Holiness has accepted costly gifts from her, and professed much friendship for her of late, a suspicion of duplicity has alienated many good Catholics from their allegiance to the true Head of the Church."

The monk watched the effect of this allusion on the Pontiff; but the harsh features of Urban were undisturbed. "It is true," he coolly remarked; "for the good of the Church, not for our own emolument, we have received her gifts, and we have kept terms with her till our plans were matured. It is now time that her unmanageable spirit be quelled, her luxurious court be broken up, and our supremacy made to blaze forth before the eyes of all the potentates of Europe. She must be made a warning, — a fearful one; and I charge you, Matteo da Villani, to see that neither she, nor the pretty doll, her niece, get access to the heart of this Prince of yours. He must be on the throne of Naples, for there he can serve us. Whether

men work for us from the pure wish to aggrandize the Church, or from the hope of reward, we must use them."

The monk, who had been so calm and decided when dealing with the feebler nature of Durazzo, now felt himself overmatched by an abler and craftier intellect than his own. The eye of Urban was still upon him, cold and stern, watching each change of his countenance, as he vainly strove to control its muscles; and he was conscious that he visibly shrunk from a glance which seemed to penetrate his inmost purposes. He looked at the door and at the youthful nephew of the Pope alternately, uncertain whether to retreat, or to venture farther into conference with one so powerful, so wily, and so remorseless.

Urban perceived his embarrassment, and relaxing his gloomy brow, added, — "The Church hath rewards, it is true, for those who serve her skilfully and faithfully, and on none can her honors be better bestowed. Your Order, Father Matteo, stands pre-eminent in services, and in your person we must find one who will both carry forward our interests and grace our favors. I bind myself by no promises, mark me," he added, observing the brightened eye of the monk; "but I bid you go back to Naples, and persevere in the work you have undertaken. I will take care that *my* physicians visit the Princess Mar-

garet; and if they manage their drugs aright, her recovery shall be conveniently tardy; while you, without molestation from her presence" ——

The cold-blooded Pontiff was here interrupted by an ejaculation from the young man, who sat almost behind him, and who arose suddenly. Urban looked at his troubled countenance a moment, with some expression of surprise, and then said quietly, "Francis! you are but a boy, and a faint-hearted one. I must indeed provide for him, who hath neither a politic brain, nor a strong hand. Go forth! a moonlight walk is fitter pastime for you than these grave colloquies. I will take sufficient care of your interests. You shall be Prince of Capua, and hold sway over a region whose soft clime may suit you well."

The young man left the room hastily, untutored, as yet, in the dark policy of the court of Rome, and rejoicing to escape from participation in counsels so nefarious; while the monk looked as if relieved by his absence;—so true it is, that there are times, when the most hardened in guilt feel some wholesome awe, in the presence of innocence. The door had scarcely closed, when he drew nearer to the table, and in a lower tone, with his eyes fixed inquiringly on the countenance of Urban, he asked,—“Will it please your Holiness to give me your commands,—your

final commands, — respecting the course to be pursued ? ”

“ Do you not comprehend the scope of my wishes ? ” said Urban ; “ have I not been sufficiently explicit ? ”

“ My instructions have not been definite,” returned the monk ; — “ how far this Prince must be driven, — to what measures we may have recourse, in order to bend this haughty Queen, — I know not.”

“ She must bend or break,” replied the Pontiff.

“ She will never yield her crown, save with the head that wears it,” urged Father Matteo.

The Pontiff paused, — “ And you choose not to venture *too* far, without the sanction of my express command ! You are a wise and cautious man, Matteo da Villani ; and must needs prosper in these troubled times. Now bear in mind what I say to you. That mock-Pope at Avignon wins men’s hearts by his courteous words and gentle deeds ; — I shrink not from dipping my hands in the blood that would gush from the neck of Joanna, Queen of Naples, — you know that I should not ; but interest, good Matteo, — interest bids me work by measures more politic. Let this Charles of Durazzo be goaded on by every spur you can apply, to a spirit so fiery ; and either in the hot hour of victory, or in some moment of despair, when she blocks up his way, manage *him* well, good

confessor, and you will find no need of precise directions from me."

The face of Father Matteo again gleamed with the terrible smile of exultation it wore, when Charles left him, at their last important interview; and that involuntary smile was marked by a shrewd observer. "I would have you speed to Naples," said Urban, "for your business there is weighty; but before our conference close, I will ask you a plain question, — and that is what you least look for. Why do you harbor malice, — bitter, persecuting, vindictive malice, against the Queen of Naples?"

The monk for an instant stood dumb. He found himself completely unmasked before one, to whom the most iniquitous windings of the human heart were familiar. But, taking courage from the very emergency of the case, he resolved to unfold his whole secret to the man, whose sympathies were believed to be with all things dark and cruel. His frame shook, and his emaciated cheeks became livid, as almost leaning on the table, he said in a suppressed, hoarse voice, — "I am the son of that Conrad Wolf, whom she drove ignominiously from Naples. Clement VI. and his Cardinals had unanimously acquitted her of the fearful charge of having murdered her husband. She came back in her pomp from Provence. I saw her triumphal pageant; — and then I

saw my father die in obscurity. He had been mangled by the infuriated populace, that had risen in her behalf, — and I swore to avenge him. I swore that she too should die a violent death ! ”

Urban looked steadfastly on the convulsed features of the monk, working with the worst passions of human nature. “ I have seen the German governor of whom you speak,” said he ; “ I recognise him in every lineament of his son’s countenance. All men said that he merited his fate.”

“ I care not ! I care not,” cried the monk, — “ forgive me, Holy Father, that I forget in whose presence I stand. My feelings do not often burst forth thus ; but for years, they have flowed on in a deep, steady, strong current, that leads to sure revenge.”

“ Thou art of the *wolf*’s own race, I see ; ” said Urban with a bitter smile ; “ and truly, there is a promise that thy thirst for blood may be quenched. Go to Naples, — to Naples, my son ! If I love not its haughty Queen, I need but give her up to thy tender mercies ; and that I surely will, if she do not grovel in the dust beneath my feet. Leave us, and set forth, for the hours are precious ; others have now claims on my time.”

The sound of footsteps was heard in the ante-room, and the monk, stifling his agitation, took a hasty leave.

Uneasy at being thus hurried away, he regretted having been thrown off his guard, and resolved to lose not an instant in hastening back to Charles, and watching for the propitious moment to accomplish his own purposes, by the hand of another. "If Joanna prove a feeble and fickle woman," he thought, "and yield all required homage to this proud Pontiff, she will escape me yet! — he will not scruple to play me false." Miserable with the doubts and anxieties that harass a bosom, on whose schemes the blessing of heaven cannot be invoked, and feeling how little reliance the unprincipled can place on each other, Matteo da Villani hurried from the dark precincts of the Vatican; and as day broke over the Sabine hills, it lighted him and his small train along the melancholy wastes of the Pontine marshes.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was on the afternoon of the twenty-fifth of August, that Joanna ascended the walls of the Castell Nuovo with a languid step, to look once more sorrowfully over the bay, for "hope deferred" had almost settled into the sickness of despair. Day by day she had seen misery deepening in the haggard countenances of those about her; and now as she passed, every eye rolled upon her glassy and vacant; every cheek was hollow with want; and as the women and children sometimes held out their meagre hands to her, silently imploring the succor she could not give, she turned from them hopelessly to the warriors, whose gaunt limbs and unsteady steps told as fearful a tale of the sufferings their own stronger frames endured. She had pledged herself to surrender on the twenty-sixth, if the expected aid from Provence should not arrive; and clinging to the last slender chance of relief, she riveted her gaze on the too familiar entrance of the harbor, with an intensity that

sometimes almost seemed to conjure up the dim outlines of objects she longed to behold.

It was while thus absorbed, and striving to realize that the *last* sun of her freedom was sinking rapidly in the western skies, that she was roused by a moan near her. She had been too much accustomed, of late, to sounds of wo to be easily startled; but this was like the last faint groan of dissolution; and turning hastily, she perceived a wretched object, lying in the shadow of a turret near her. It was an elderly female, whose features were drawn out and sharpened by the pangs of hunger and the approach of death. Her head was supported by a pale, thin youth, who occasionally wiped the damps from her forehead; and, as he stooped forward to watch the life coming and going in her fixed eyes, was unconscious of the Queen's approach. Joanna had, as yet, heard of no actual death from starvation, in her garrison; and struck to the heart by this spectacle, she involuntarily drew near, and stood before the expiring woman. For a moment she was recognised; the poor sufferer made a feeble effort to raise her head and stretch out her bony hand, whispering, — "It is the Queen, — our good Queen." The young man looked up, but did not move; and after a momentary relapse, the woman again uttered, falteringly, — "Serve her, Giovanni! — I charge you, my son! — serve our good Joanna!"

The Queen was choked with emotion, as she heard these words of affection from a subject, dying so miserable a death at her very feet; and again she felt, as she had often done, the littleness of all human power. She was still a Queen, — still an object of veneration to this departing spirit; — but not, in her proudest days, could she have stayed its flight one moment. It might be some such consciousness, that floated through the mind of the young Giovanni; for after the first glance, he seemed to forget the presence of majesty; until Joanna, unable to look idly on the convulsive spasms of the dying woman, turned hastily away, and commanded an attendant to bring food, if it were the last crum in the fortress.

The youth then impatiently moving his hand exclaimed, “No! no! it is too late!” It was indeed; in another moment, his mother again, as with her last struggle, said more distinctly, — “Serve her, my son, for she has been good to us!” — and then turning to his breast, drew her limbs upwards with a shiver, and after a few gasps, ceased to breathe.

The cry, which seemed to break from the heart of the youth, rung terribly in the ears of the Queen, and incapable of speaking consolation amidst the first bursts of filial sorrow, she retired at once to her apartments; and herself gave directions respecting fitting burial for the body. It had seemed to her, that those

emaciated features had not been unknown to her in former days ; and when, at sunset, her attendants informed her that the youth requested permission to see her, she eagerly ordered him to be admitted into her presence. He was scarcely eighteen ; and his hunger-stricken countenance betrayed that youthful vigor alone had enabled him to sustain the fearful ordeal under which his mother had sunk. He was now calm, though the traces of sorrow remained on his swollen eyelids. His soiled but once costly apparel showed him to be no menial ; and the modest courtesy, with which he thanked the Queen for her kindness, was that of one who had been accustomed to approach personages of high rank. His face, too, had in it something familiar ; and Joanna sought in vain to recall when and where she had seen him. " I cannot forget my mother's last words, so long as I have breath," said he, with a faltering voice. " She bade me serve you ; to-morrow may take away the power ; and I have come to ask your Majesty, if it be indeed possible that I may obey her commands."

" Tell me first," said the Queen, " who is the faithful son and true subject, that forsakes neither his mother nor his Queen in their adversity ?"

" I was a beardless boy when your Majesty last saw me, but suffering hath changed me more than time. My mother has often told me how, at the close of the

terrible pestilence, you reëntered Naples from your exile; and how you passed, one day, like a radiant angel, all pomp, youth, and beauty through the street where she lived, when my father fell smitten by the destroying angel on his own threshold; — how your attendants stood back terrified, while you came down from your palfrey, and courageously held water from a neighboring fountain to his lips, and spoke comfort to her; — and how you protected the widowed and fatherless, when his corpse was thrown into the dreadful pit. Have you forgotten that when you discovered her to be of gentle birth, you gave her a place among the attendants of your own lovely infant? ”

“ I remember it all,” cried Joanna. “ When God smote my child in its cradle, with sudden and mysterious death, I came back from the gorgeous ceremonies of my coronation, to forget its splendor in the rosy smiles of the darling whom I left slumbering in perfect health, — and your mother stood sobbing over its lifeless clay! — I have not seen her for years past, but could I forget her? ”

“ Your bounty reached her,” said the youth, “ and for me you provided nobly.”

The Queen’s countenance changed. “ I recognise you too,” said she; “ I procured you an appointment in the household of my son — of Charles of Durazzo. You were his page, I think? ”

"I am so," replied Giovanni.

"And what do you here?" asked the Queen hastily.

"When my master approached Naples," said the page, "I hurried forward to protect my mother. I found her feeble from recent illness, and she reproached me because I did not forsake him, for his treachery to you. I could not! I could not! for to me he has been a noble and kind master, and I love him. The people fled in all directions, and she conjured me to bring her hither. We entered with the throng, and I staid to soothe her sufferings, — to support her while I could, — to see her die at last. And now, I would go back to my kind, generous, misguided Prince."

Joanna sat a few moments, lost in thought; and then suddenly repeating his last words, — "Misguided Prince! alas! alas!" she strove to repress a groan.

Giovanni spoke not, but his varying countenance expressed shame for the master he adored, and respectful compassion for the injured sovereign before him. At last he inquired timidly, "Is there no way in which the page of Durazzo can aid the Queen of Naples? You will not bid me leave him."

"No, no!" cried Joanna; "God forbid that those to whom he may have shown kindness should prove ungrateful! May *that* punishment never wring his

heart. Go to him, faithful boy, and serve him so far as you can innocently, through joy and sorrow, — through the deceitful hours of guilty prosperity, — and the dreadful season of retribution. *I* ask no other kindness at your hands."

The youth burst into tears, and sunk on his knee before her; it was the homage of uncorrupted feelings to her virtue rather than her rank; and Joanna's dry and burning eyes were moistened with an emotion most grateful in the midst of her afflictions. "Is there nothing, — nothing I can do for my august sovereign? I would fain perform somewhat that I may be glad to remember, when I am a man, — some service to her personally."

The Queen shook her head; — but as the youth rose, something crossed her mind, and she exclaimed, — "Yes, — stay! — My poor husband! we may never meet again; — and a line from my own hand would cheer his brave heart! Giovanni, will you leave the honored remains of your mother under my charge? There are priests in the fortress and her dust shall not be neglected. I will have masses said for her soul; — but speed you forth this very night into the city to rejoin your master; and find means to bear one farewell word from your unfortunate Queen to her husband. Will you undertake it?" The young man hesitated, and she added, — "I would not have

you peril your life, and you know best yourself, with what risks the enterprise may be fraught. I do not urge it."

"It is not of my life I am thinking," said Giovanni, "but of my honor; yet I know not that I should pass the bounds of duty to my master, in fulfilling your request. My mother's dying words are in my ears, and I will obey them at all hazards."

The Queen paused a little longer for reflection; and then turning to a table, where lay her writing implements, she penned a hasty note of affection to Otho, apprizing him of her approaching capitulation, and bidding him a solemn farewell; for she felt that her future destiny was darkened by the prospect of a long separation. Giovanni departed at twilight, and by the Queen's command, was permitted egress from the Castle, through one of the subterranean passages, leading to the water's edge. We need not follow him; it is sufficient to say, that having presented himself to his princely master, with whom he was deservedly a favorite, and explained his absence, he found means to convey the letter of Joanna into the enemy's camp, and to the hands of Otho, before day-break. Meantime the Queen forgot not her promise, with regard to the poor woman who had died in her presence; and on the last evening of her cruel siege, the most solemn services of religion were performed

in the Castell Nuovo, by those who felt that if relief were not at hand, their own enfeebled limbs might next lie down in the grave.

Few slept in the wretched garrison on that night. Reduced to the last extremity, many of the famishing wandered about ceaselessly, — hushing the moans of their children, — watching the slow march of the stars; and as the hours wore on, casting many an impatient glance to the east. The faintest silver light was breaking over the hills, when Joanna left a couch haunted by horrid dreams, and went up for the last time among her people, — few and faithful, — to survey the uprising of the sun which would probably light her into captivity. All night long, she had been tormented with visions of blood, or with phantasmagoria of the ghastly faces that met her by day; and as the pale dawn of the fatal twenty-sixth of August gave them again to her view, hovering along the walls like spectres, she shuddered and felt, that any fate to her would be welcome, which might save these unhappy creatures from the slow and torturing death of famine. As the eastern horizon grew brighter and brighter, she had not the heart to look, as she had once done, on that gorgeous spectacle, which never wearies the eyes of the happy; but turning to the sea, vacantly contemplated the harbor, and Capri rising dimly on the southern verge. Her thoughts

were no longer on the promised aid from France; treachery had beset her all her life long, and Durazzo had blighted the last remaining germs of her confidence in mortal man. "Gay Provence has forgotten me;" said she to herself; "the mild and affable Clement will not aid me; — Anjou is too busy with his own pressing cares; — there is no man living, that can or will strike one blow more for the liberties of Naples or its deserted Queen! Even my husband has not the power to help me, or knows not how critical is the emergency. Oh, Charles! the bitterness of all bitterness is to feel that *thou* hast made my misery! — that in two short hours more, thy unnatural crime will be consummated, and I shall be hurled from the throne by the very hands I have so often clasped in mine, when thou wast like a loving son to me, — an innocent, affectionate, true-hearted boy! Shall I not awake, and find it all a terrible dream?"

The time had indeed been fixed at two hours past sunrise, when the Castell Nuovo was to be yielded, without condition, into the power of Durazzo; and though Joanna did not face the east, she knew when the glorious luminary had lifted himself above the Apennines; his rays shot across the city and bay, and gilding the ridge of Posilipo, called, as it were, into bright existence its wooded heights and white villas. Still she sat motionless; her officers silently gathered

about her; and from the various subterranean passages and cells of the fortress its whole wan and trembling population came pouring up, as if the graves were yielding their dead. The walls next the city were lined with them, standing, sitting, or lying, as their strength permitted, in mute expectation. A clock struck in a neighboring church; it was the only one in Naples, and still a new thing on the earth, and men, not yet familiar with it, felt, when that solemn voice came forth on the air, as if Time himself spoke to them, while he sped on his awful course. Even the Queen started at the sound, and withdrew her sad contemplations from the monastery of San Martino, the object of her munificence in happier days. Battista recalled her attention to the same quarter, however, by pointing out something about the Castle of St. Elmo, which frowned on the heights just above it; and with looks of surprise, she conferred with her officers for some moments before she left the walls. She retired to her private apartment, as the hour of surrender arrived; but Luca di Battista followed shortly to inform her, that though the city was evidently in commotion, no one approached the fortress. "The passage leading into the Strada di Toledo is deserted," said he; "we see armed men continually passing and repassing across it, at a distance, and there is a sound of tumult that increases every moment; but *we* seem to be forgotten."

The Queen, who had assumed a noble composure, now became agitated. "I believe you were right," said she; — "that brave boy kept his word with me, last night, and Otho is roused to an effort that may cost him dear."

"He must have attacked the city," returned the Baron; — "I know of nothing else, that could withdraw the attention of the enemy, at this moment. Courage, my Queen! — we may be saved!"

"No — no" — replied Joanna; "do not excite false hopes, my good Baron; it is the alternation of hope and despair, that frets out the heartstrings. Had the galleys from Provence arrived, a general onset from without might have done me good service; and for that advantage, Otho has, no doubt waited; but the news of my unhappy condition has driven him on a desperate measure. He will fail; my heart forebodes nothing but evil."

"Nay," — exclaimed the nobleman; "think better of it. Your Majesty is worn down with fasting and anxiety, and they make even men prone to despond."

"I know it," said Joanna, sadly. "The weakness of this frail tabernacle of clay does strangely debilitate the nobler tenant within. I will repair once more to the walls."

As she approached a flight of steps, leading from a court up to the ramparts, a large hound, still stately

in his proportions, though extenuated by famine, crawled towards her, whining and feebly making demonstrations of joy at seeing her. He had belonged to her husband, and had once saved his master's life in a boar hunt; and though not another animal in the fortress had been spared, Joanna had given orders that this faithful creature should not be slaughtered till the last extremity. He had not tasted food for three days; and as he looked up expressively in her face, with his large imploring eyes, the Baron said, "Methinks it were greater humanity to knock the poor beast on the head, than let him die by inches. Starving is an ugly death."

The Queen looked irresolute; she passed her hand over his long velvet ears, and as he stooped his head to receive the caress, the gold collar which her husband had playfully fastened round his neck, as the reward of his bravery, caught her eye. "No!" she exclaimed, turning away; "I have not the heart to give such an order. Live on, a few hours longer, poor Brancone, and thou shalt have a new master. Di Battista, — he that will enter this Castle to-day, as a victor, loves a noble dog, and will feed the hound, though he starve the mistress."

"Aye," said di Battista to himself; — "the dog hath no crown to be coveted."

They mounted to the walls, and as Joanna seated herself where she could look down into the square between the Castle and the city, she felt something touch her hand. It was the dog, who had followed her with difficulty; and as she bade him couch at her feet, obedient to the last, he lay, or rather fell down before her, and stretching forth his limbs, tried to forget in uneasy sleep the hunger that gnawed his vitals.

In the mean time the clashing of weapons came now distinctly on the breeze, and as the inhabitants of the Castle stood listening breathlessly, wonder and anxiety were on every face. At times, the skirmish seemed to recede, and then it approached again; but nearly an hour elapsed, before any token of the battle presented itself. Suddenly, shouts were heard more plainly; — a cloud of dust was seen rising above the houses in the Strada di Toledo. It advanced slowly, and at last, a tumultuous throng appeared at the foot of the street, leading from that main thoroughfare of Naples to the square before the Castell Nuovo. Half veiled in dust, and engaged in furious conflict, they came on; but it was plain that every inch of ground was contested; and the progress of the party struggling to reach the Castle was tardy.

Frantic with joy and reviving hope, Luca di Battista summoned his feeble band of archers to their posts; and though it was evident that scarcely a dozen had

strength to draw the long bow, he prepared boldly to aid the approaching friends, and exclaimed again and again to the Queen, — “Courage, my noble mistress! they fight like lions! — we shall open the gates to them presently.”

The Queen did not remove her eyes from the scene, but still sorrowful in aspect, only answered, — “They bring us no bread.”

“But they open a passage through the enemy,” cried the sanguine warrior; “they will find means to throw in provisions, or set us free, trust me!”

At this moment, a single knight, mounted on a powerful bay horse, burst through all opposition, and waving his bloody sword above his head, came galloping into the square. The white and silver scarf about his body, despite its crimson stains, showed that he belonged to the Queen’s friends; and di Battista shouted loudly and incessantly to the men at the gates to open them and push forward the drawbridge. Before the brave knight could reach the moat, however, several of the enemy dashed after him into the square; and as he turned to defend himself, still backing his horse towards the Castle, their strokes rained upon every part of his armor. The flash of weapons in the broad sunlight was dazzling to the beholders, but he who fought, singlehanded against such fearful odds, lost not his presence of mind for an instant; — plung-

ing his sword into a crevice in the armor of one antagonist, he drew it forth reeking; then suddenly wheeling about, he dextrously hamstringed the steed of another rider, who came heavily to the ground, and left him for a moment unmolested. He again pushed towards the drawbridge, but in vain; the enemy were upon him. Two spurred between him and the Castle, and not a follower of his own had yet emerged from the street; his headlong valor had led him beyond their assistance; but without a shout or a word, he defended himself manfully. The archers discharged their arrows from the battlements; but many of them dropped short of the mark, and others fell impotently, as if sent by the hands of children, against the helmets and shields of the assailants. Luca di Battista raged like a chained tyger; and crying, — “Give me a crossbow; — it brings the strong and the weak on a level,” he seized a huge arbalist and prepared to discharge it with his own hands. The Queen, meantime, had watched every movement below with the most intense interest; she had started up, as the knight entered the square, and standing with clasped hands and blanched lips, her garments fluttering in the breeze, she seemed almost ready to leap wildly into the fearful scene. Once or twice she exclaimed, “Who is he? di Battista! do you not know him?” — “No, not I,” cried the Baron; “he is a

brave man, bear he what name he may; — and we will have him among us, please Heaven.”

The unknown warrior was now within a few yards of the moat, and once, for a single instant, he looked up at the spot where the Queen stood; but through his closed visor, she could not discern his features. “Yet it must be he! it can be none else!” she whispered to herself; and the blood rushed joyfully to her face, as she perceived several knights in white and silver scarfs present themselves at the entrance of the square. It retreated upon her heart again, however, as a huge soldier, already unhelmeted in the conflict, and gashed on one cheek, approached the solitary combatant, whose attention was again, for a moment, drawn off, by the appearance of his followers. The man raised his immense battle-axe unheeded, as the warrior, sending forth his voice for the first time, shouted to his knights to come on. No sooner was that voice heard than the hound, who had been lying apparently unable to stir, by the side of Joanna, uttered a cry, and getting on his feet with difficulty, crawled to the very edge of the wall. He gazed down earnestly a moment, then raising his head, snuffed the breeze, and having uttered a few moans, as if conscious of the danger, he sprang down into the moat. Too feeble to swim, he struggled but a few instants, and sunk in the stagnant waters. This

last display of fidelity in poor Brancone told Joanna, too plainly, who was the heroic knight ; her agony of suspense was already dreadful, and a shriek broke from her lips, as Luca di Battista discharged an immense javelin from his crossbow. At the precise instant that it left the bow, aimed at the man who wielded the battle-axe, the beset knight perceived his danger, and to avoid the blow levelled at his crest, checked his steed, who in rearing intercepted the weapon from the walls. It pierced his shoulder ; the noble animal made a plunge forward, and thus exposed the head of his rider to the fatal stroke of the battle-axe. It descended,—the helmet gave way,—and the light German hair and manly features of Otho were exposed to view, as he was dashed senseless to the ground !

Joanna knew nothing more. For the first time in her life, she fainted away utterly, and was carried down to her apartment.

CHAPTER IX.

THE desperate valor of Otho was wasted ; with his fall ceased the conflict ; slain, wounded, or made prisoners, his troops suffered severely from the enterprise ; and before noonday the ruin of Joanna was decided ; her last hope destroyed. She bore the intelligence with fortitude, however. On recovering from her swoon, she learned that her husband still lived, though wounded and in the power of the enemy ; and after a few hours' retirement, she nerved herself to endure an interview with her conqueror.

It was in the coolest and loveliest hour of the day, when the land breeze blew refreshingly from the hills, and the sun was sinking peacefully towards the horizon, that the immense gates of the Castell Nuovo were set open, its broad moat bridged for the adversary's tread, and the square before it filled with armed men. Durazzo himself first planted his foot on that bridge, but it was with a downcast eye. Then came on rank after rank of silent soldiery, following

under the dark, massive archway, which, flanked with huge round towers, seemed built to endure for ages. As they entered the court and filed to the right and left, before them stood the small and half-starved garrison of Joanna; their visors up, and their ghastly countenances bearing dreadful testimony to the sufferings they had endured; while at every loophole, and at the doors of dark passages were dimly seen innumerable faces of women and children still more emaciated with want. From the centre of the little group of soldiers advanced Luca di Battista, himself pale with fasting and sleepless nights, but with an aspect so haughty and stern, that as he fixed his eyes on the approaching victor, they spoke the contempt which he felt in his soul; and an observer, ignorant of the truth, would have reversed the relative position of the two warriors. Di Battista might have been taken for the spirit of the fierce Charles of Anjou, the builder of the Castle, rising from his grave in anger at the ingrate, who came to rend her inheritance from his fair descendant. The step of Durazzo had lost its martial firmness; it was slow and unequal; he changed color every moment, and with a trembling hand, without looking him in the face, he received from di Battista the massy keys of the fortress, and hastily delivered them to an officer who was to be its commander.

This slight ceremony over, the troops of Durazzo were dispersed to their respective positions along the deserted walls, which soon bristled on every point with lances and spears; and the native humanity of Charles's disposition, chilled but not frozen by a selfish ambition, manifested itself in the next arrangement. Wagons, loaded with provision, came creaking through the gateway, and the sufferings of the famished were at an end. The chief seneschal of Joanna, with several of the officers usually in attendance on her person, then appeared to conduct Durazzo to her presence. They had reached the spacious ante-chamber to her apartment, when the Confessor of the Prince suddenly arriving at the Castell Nuovo, followed him without hesitation, and overtook him as he crossed its threshold. The monk had been absent for a few days, and had returned to Naples at the critical moment when the troops were marching into the fortress; and on learning that an interview was to take place between the conqueror and the conquered, he lost not a moment. Without staying to shake the dust of travel from his dress, he hurried unceremoniously through the knightly throng, that pressed towards the ante-room to catch a glimpse of a Queen so celebrated; and coming up with the Prince as he entered the lofty apartment where Joanna had proposed to receive him, he laid

his hand hastily on his arm. "My son! my son!" said he; "what are you doing? Did I not caution you? Did I not warn you?"

"I know it," replied Durazzo; "but how can I shrink from the presence of a woman? I would rather mount the scaffold than meet her eye; but she demands to see me, and on what plea can I refuse a boon so trifling?"

"Tush! folly, — folly!" ejaculated the priest; "step hither and hear me." He drew the Prince aside, and with earnest gestures and indefatigable perseverance used every argument in his power to dissuade him from holding the purposed colloquy. He was but too eloquently aided by something in Durazzo's own bosom; who, conscience-stricken, and ashamed of the position in which he stood towards the Queen, trembled as he entered the state-halls of the Angevins, and approached her, on whom he was inflicting wrongs so base.

"It were better that we should not meet, I acknowledge;" said he; "but now that I stand almost in her presence, — now that I have intruded on the sanctity of the royal apartments, and have warned her of my approach, — it were unknighly rudeness, methinks, and most unbecoming in a generous conqueror to turn from her, as with mere wanton caprice!"

“Idle, boyish scruples!” exclaimed Father Matteo; “said I not so? I knew that the very air she breathed would unman you; your brave knights will yet look on with scornful smiles, to see their hero caught in the snares of this Jezebel. Go forth from these enchanted chambers, my son, if you are not already spell-bound and nerveless, and leave me to deal with her who is your deadliest enemy. I will bring you her demands; her smooth accents and boasted eloquence will find another hearer than the purchaser of Avignon. I pray you, have mercy on yourself, my Prince, and begone from these dangerous walls. The house of Anjou totters at your touch, but you may be crushed in its ruins, if you will not be counselled.”

Perturbed and uncertain what course to pursue, still accustomed to be governed by the voice that addressed him so authoritatively, Charles actually turned to retire; when the double doors at the upper end of the hall were thrown open, and a dazzling vision presented itself. Joanna stood before him in the centre of a sparkling semicircle of attendants; and she herself blazed forth in the full majesty of a Queen. Either by chance or design, the dress she wore was similar to that in which he first saw her arrayed for some public occasion; rich folds of drapery fell round her statue-like form with classic

grace; its glossy silken texture was wrought with flowers of gold; her girdle was composed of jewels; the crown, which rested lightly on her high forehead, glittered with diamonds and rubies; and her hands, folded on her breast, held a small but exquisitely wrought crucifix, worthy the approaching days of Cellini. The lofty beauty of her countenance was almost unearthly; excitement glowed in her cheeks, and flushed from her sunken but expressive eyes; and she looked all that she had been in the glory of her earlier days, when the gaze of a Petrarch delighted to dwell on one who realized a poet's dream of female loveliness, and the laughter-loving Boccaccio learned to reverence virtue in a form so fascinating. Years rolled back; — the day, — the hour, when that same resplendent form first stood before him, rose on the memory of Durazzo; and though the rosy lips of the apparition no longer wore the sweet, maternal smile, which then dispelled his boyish timidity, but greeted him with a cold yet placid gravity, the present moment vanished completely in the gush of fond recollections. He stood thunderstruck an instant, and then as he rushed forward and threw himself at the Queen's feet, the tender appellation of other days, — "My mother! my mother!" burst from his unconscious lips. The witnesses of a scene so unexpected remained hushed as death; the monk bit his nether

lip, and with a countenance lurid with wrath, turned away; the Queen herself forgot her august composure, and as her lip trembled with a momentary emotion, she almost laid her hand kindly on the bent head of the Prince; but suddenly recollecting herself, she drew back proudly. "I have wished to see you, Charles of Durazzo," she said, "but not thus. Rise, — for that posture little becomes the terms on which we meet."

Charles stood up, his cheeks burning with shame, and his eyes fixed on the ground; and with the same calm, sweet tone the Queen proceeded. "You are my *master*, — by strength of arms you are so; but the crown of my ancestors is on my brows, and never, while I breathe, will I voluntarily place it on the head of — an usurper. He that wears it, shall be worthy of it. This it was my pleasure that you should hear from my own lips."

The undaunted spirit of this declaration roused the pride of Charles for a moment, and retreating a few steps, he looked up boldly; but again cowered as he encountered the brilliant eye of Joanna, fixed steadily upon him. He stammered a few words, and the Queen bent her head forward to listen; but unable to express himself articulately, he looked towards his Confessor. The monk met his embarrassed glance with a contemptuous smile, and the Queen resumed, — "I ask

of you the safety of my husband and my garrison. — Priests, women, children, — and a few brave men, once able to bear the weight of armor and skilful to use it, have clung to my fallen fortunes with an affection and fidelity that have touched my heart's core! — I would not be *ungrateful*, — however I may be sunken in the world's eye; but a deposed Queen has little grace to grant. I can plead for their lives and property, with their conqueror and mine, — it is all I can do; and for that purpose, I use the few brief moments of our interview. Is my petition granted?"

"It is," said Durazzo; — "all, every thing you can ask! Try me farther! Demand any thing that I *can* perform, and prove whether I am as heartless and ungrateful as you deem me."

"Nay! — I have but one favor more to ask; — an honorable prison, — a convent rather than a dungeon."

"Mother in heaven!" cried the Prince; "a prison! Think you I am a brute, a monster? I would smite the head from the shoulders of him who should speak of a prison for the person of my adored benefactress! Never, so help me Heaven! shall wrong or outrage approach you, while the son of your adoption wields a sword or draws the breath of life! No, — most august Joanna. By divine injunction I receive the crown, which must pass from the house of Anjou;

by the will of him who bears the keys of Heaven, and through whose mouth God himself speaks his sovereign pleasure to earthly princes, I claim the throne which you *must* vacate; but never,—never shall I forget the filial love of my boyhood; never shall I inflict one unnecessary pang upon the heart that opened to me in my desolation. You shall dwell with me in the Castle, whose foundations were laid deep in the seashore by your warlike progenitor, and steadfast as those foundations you shall find the faith of Durazzo! Trust me,—dearest mother;—give me back your love, your confidence. Abide with me with all the wonted splendors of your rank about you; cheer me in my troubles; aid me with your counsels; and though I may not bow the knee of a subject, I will pay the fondest homage of a son at your feet.”

As the Prince spoke, he again sunk on one knee, and attempted to raise the golden hem of her garment to his lips; but the Queen withdrew it with dignity; and as a slight expression of scorn passed over her face, she replied;—“This hour unfolds how little you know me, Durazzo; how ill you can understand the true spirit of a born sovereign. I will not wrong you; I think not that you speak to mock and insult me, though a proposal so degrading quickens this pulse with an indignation you have not the soul to comprehend. You are bound by the laws of chivalry

to respect me as a woman, and an oppressed one ; and I do not hold you such a recreant, that you wilfully pour contumely on your prisoner. But I tell you, Charles of Durazzo, I will not look tamely on your usurpation. I will not walk about these halls like the eagle, whose wings are clipped. I will be caged, or I will soar ! Till my subjects forsake me to the last man, I will not forsake them, nor acquiesce in a mean compact, which transfers them to an unprincipled ruler." Charles started up, but the Queen went on. " I know you, Prince of Durazzo ;—I know you now. Physical courage you have ; fearless and brave as a lion in the face of danger ; but moral courage,—the noblest gift of your race, you have not. You have some vague, unsettled sentiments of honor ; but fixed principles you have not ; and he who is the slave of blind impulse cannot rule a kingdom rightly."

" Urban thinks not so," said Durazzo ; " he reads me better than she who trained me at her knee."

" Rememberest thou those days, Charles ?" asked the Queen, in a voice so soft and tremulous, and with a tone so melancholy that the eyes of all present filled with tears. The Prince shook ; his heart swelled, and it was with difficulty he repressed the impulse to burst forth, once more, into protestations of affection ; but a sudden movement of the monk, who seemed about

to interfere in the colloquy, checked him. "If the Head of the Church," — he began, — "if Urban himself" —

"Name him not," interrupted Joanna; "he too is an usurper, and himself born a subject of Naples, he may well preach treason. You well know, Durazzo, that I cleave to the cause of Clement, and look upon the Archbishop of Bari as one who has grasped the keys of St. Peter with a sacrilegious hand, and has made intrigue and sedition his stepping stones to power which he abuses. You know that I gave shelter to the Cardinals who fled from his tortures; that when the tiara was brought secretly to Fondi, I sent my ambassadors to witness the coronation of Robert of Savoy, to whom I bow as Clement VII., the only lawful Father of the Church; and that I have thereby drawn on my head a fierce and unrelenting persecution. Urban, Charles, is my deadly enemy, — the enemy of my prosperity, — my peace, — my life, and my *reputation*. If my name goes down to posterity blackened with calumnies that make me shudder as I think of them, it is his hand that has given the mortal stab to my fame! his influence that will live along the page of history, blighting the character of an injured and innocent woman, long after her bones have crumbled to dust. Oh, Charles! that you should become the puppet of him, who would crush me into

the earth ; who would drive me from the memory of the good, and shut out my soul from heaven, were that his prerogative ; — that you, whom I once loved so tenderly, should become a thing I cannot respect, — a gilded toy-king I must despise ! ”

A hectic spot was now on the cheek of Durazzo ; when Luca di Battista burst suddenly into the apartment, exclaiming, — “ The laggard, craven slaves ! I would a whirlwind met them now ! Look there, my Queen ! ” And as he spoke, the impetuous Baron threw back the lattice from a window near Joanna, which commanded a view of the bay. The whole lovely scene was bathed in the richest crimson glow of sunset ; but the eye of the Queen marked little of its beauty, for full in view, ten French galleys came on, just rounding the promontory of Posilipo, and ploughing the golden waves, as they beat up bravely against the land breeze, that almost baffled their progress. The Queen stood dumb, gazing as if bewildered, and almost fancying it some optical illusion, conjured up by the sunbeams and evening vapors ; then sadly exclaiming, — “ Too late ! too late ! ” she clasped her hands before her eyes to shut out a spectacle so glorious in itself, so cruel under existing circumstances ; and sunk into a seat.

After some little conference with his officers and with Father Matteo, Charles respectfully approached

the Queen, whose spirits and fortitude seemed for a time to have given way. "I relieve you from my presence for to-day," said he; "but to-morrow, when refreshed by sleep, you will perhaps admit me to a conference that may terminate more satisfactorily."

"I know not that," replied Joanna, somewhat impatiently; "but I would pray you one thing with all earnestness. Let not these tardy Frenchmen be harmed; let them go back in safety from their fruitless errand; and let me have one interview with them, that I may thank them for the good they purposed."

"It shall be so," replied Durazzo; "they shall be treated as my own guests; and to-morrow, if such be your pleasure, they shall be ushered into your presence."

"I would fain see them," replied the Queen; "my destiny is sealed; and after to-morrow, I would quit the Castell Nuovo."

The Prince and his attendants left the apartment, and Joanna, worn out with fatigue and excitement, retired to solitude and tears.

CHAPTER X.

IT was with unavailing consternation and regret, that the deputies from Provence learned whose was the banner floating so proudly on the tower San Martino; and that, had they reached the bay of Naples but a few hours sooner, its unfortunate Queen might have been saved from a captivity as hopeless as unjust. Mournfully they entered her presence on the day after their arrival; but they were not permitted a private interview. Charles himself had gone to the Castello dell' Uovo, on the west side of the city, under whose wave-encircled walls the French fleet was moored. He had proposed to strengthen its fortifications, and, at the instigation of his Confessor, had chosen this day to inspect it; but several of his officers attended the foreigners in their conference with the Queen, and Father Matteo mingled unbidden with the train. It was his policy to keep the Prince from all direct intercourse with a woman, whose high spirit might soon be broken; and whose tender ap-

peals to the better nature of Charles would then, he well knew, be irresistible; and he resolved, if possible, to be the medium of communication between them. He feared indeed that a single night's reflection on the actual position of her affairs might have humbled her into concessions, which would satisfy the ambition of the Prince; but the first glance at her regal brow, as he followed the French into her audience chamber, satisfied him that he need dread no humility on her part, which would be dangerous to his schemes of vengeance. The treasures which she and her principal nobility had borne with them into the Castle were still employed to support the splendor she deemed becoming her rank; for in that age, the Genius of Invention, newly awakened from a sleep of centuries, toiled diligently in the service of luxury. The costly attire of the Cardinals, who thronged around the wealthy Clement at the court of Avignon, would have purchased whole cities in the days of the ancient republics, though the anathemas of the Church of Rome were thundered against the vanities, not only of crowned heads and nobility, but of churchmen themselves. Joanna, — a female, scarce emerging from childhood when she mounted the throne, had caught the spirit of the age. Her reign was the era of many inventions; one of her own subjects had bestowed the Compass on the ad-

venturous mariner; and the delicious climate of Naples, the attractions of its sovereign, and her liberality towards all worthy objects, drawing many distinguished foreigners to her court, it had been her delight to welcome them with a magnificence suited to her resources.

She now sat on a chair of state, raised three steps above the floor; a canopy of cloth of silver above her, and a blue velvet carpet, flowered with silver, covering the steps at her feet. Her own dress was simple but costly; the single band of gold, which confined her veil, being enriched with the most precious gems; a cross of large rubies resting on her swan-like neck, and her black velvet robe delicately embroidered round the hem with vine-leaves and bunches of grapes in pearls. She was no longer flushed with feverish excitement, nor unnaturally pale; her eye had regained the calm, thoughtful expression it had worn for years, and no one who looked at her would have believed her a Queen but yesterday deposed. Her reception of the French noblemen, as they were severally introduced to her, was full of her accustomed sweetness and majesty; and one or two of them she recognised at once. "Noble Baron of Rocroi!" said she, "it is many, — many years since we parted at Nice; we may almost count them by tens; yet it were not well to dwell on

the events through which they have whirled us. It seems a dark, misty chaos, as I look back; but I joy to see your soldier-like frame unbent by time."

"These locks were hardly touched with silver, when your Majesty left your faithful subjects in Provence," said the old warrior, as he knelt to kiss her extended hand.

"No," replied Joanna, "but white as they now are, and worn upon the temples by the helmet, you see I cannot forget the hawk eye of Rocroi. And this youth,—his face is familiar, yet he could not have seen the light, when we broke up our court to traverse the seas."

"It is the young de Lisle," replied the Baron de Rocroi, "who prayed earnestly to come on this expedition, that he might behold her of whom he has dreamed from his cradle."

"De Lisle!" repeated the Queen sadly; "I loved your mother, young man; the beautiful Countess de Lisle was the pride and ornament of my French court. In her bridal days we walked together amid the shades of Vaucluse; and her tears fell fast when we parted. It is her clear olive complexion and her animated smile that you inherit. Did she bequeath to you, also, her reverence for her sovereign, her sympathy for the oppressed?"

“She did, indeed,” exclaimed the youth eagerly, half drawing his sword from the scabbard; “and I have thought nineteen summers too many over my head, before I brought my maiden blade into your Majesty’s service.”

“*One* day too many has indeed passed,” said the Queen, with a melancholy smile; “and now, my good and brave friends, — trusty, I doubt not, though dilatory; how chanced this fatal delay? What adverse wind swept the Mediterranean, when the fate of Joanna hung on your speed?”

The Frenchmen looked downwards in silence; and it was some moments before the venerable Rocroi replied to her inquiry. “It is true that we were for many days wind-bound in the port of Marseilles; but, — gracious Queen, — your cry for help came across the waters, just when the death of the monarch had thrown the whole kingdom of France into confusion, and Louis of Anjou was straining every nerve to raise troops in his own defence. His regency was over, but tumult and bloodshed were about him, and distracted by innumerable perplexities, he could not take measures in your behalf so promptly as his heart would have dictated.”

The Queen listened with attention to the defence of the worthy Baron; but paused before she answered. A slight expression of doubt passed over her face,

and leaning on the arm of her chair, she covered her eyes with her hand, as if willing to reflect on what she had heard. "Good Baron of Rocroi," said she at length, "you were wont to be highly esteemed as a man of no less sagacity and integrity than prowess; and such I do hold you. Tell me then, are these the unvarnished facts? Is Louis of Anjou true in his heart and worthy of my confidence?"

"He is!" exclaimed the old knight with energy. "I believe him a most honorable and highminded Prince; and that the evil star of Queen Joanna, which bade her summon his aid at the very conjuncture, when he could not grant it, ruled him in this matter. Never, — never will *he* wrong or deceive you, most august Queen; and I verily believe he will be smitten with the sorest anguish, when he learns how ill our errand hath sped. Men dreamed not that your danger was so imminent."

"I thank you for this assurance, worthy de Rocroi," replied the Queen, with her former unclouded aspect; "I trust *you*; but who, — who can wonder, that a nature, once too confiding, hath long since become prone to distrust? Who can blame me, when so lately forced to rend an idol from my heart" — She paused to recover herself, but it was only for an instant. "Now, most noble Barons of Provence, I see around you men, whose swords and hearts are pledged

to the cause of Durazzo ; I see Italians by your side, who will listen to my words in the spirit of jealousy and hatred ; yet, in their presence, will I speak boldly. You well know, that at the tender age of fifteen, I came to the crown. What perils, what difficulties, what temptations then surrounded me, no mortal man can know. It was not a day of vainglorious exultation ; the tears of my regret fell on the grave of my venerable grandsire, and I trembled as I looked on the wild breakers, amid which he had left me, though I knew not half their hidden dangers. My sex, my age, my rank, — those charms of which courtiers told me, now rapidly waning, — each and all brought their own trials ; yet men had no mercy on my youth and inexperience ; they forgave not my errors ; they forgot not my infirmities ; they exaggerated my indiscretions ; I had deadly foes and false friends, and my life has been a succession of calamities ; my reign filled with hurricanes, both political and domestic, and slander has ever been busy with that, which is dearer than life to the virtuous, — my good fame. Yet, noble Barons ; — as truly as I now stand before you, a living, breathing, hapless woman, — so truly does my conscience acquit me of aught that approaches crime ; so truly have I striven to serve God and my fellow-creatures, in all innocence and uprightness. The enemies of my youth are in their graves ; the sorrows

of my earlier years have receded into the gloomy Past; but where do I now stand? Let me declare to you in the presence of yonder lowering Dominican, that I know myself to be on the brink of a precipice, and I know whose fierce hostility hath driven me to it. I refused to acknowledge the unjust election of the Archbishop of Bari, — a bad man and a cruel one; * and he hath denounced me, excommunicated me, tampered with the fidelity of my subjects, stolen from me the affections of the son I adopted, poisoned the sweet cup of domestic happiness, threatened me with ruin, and I am in his power. Think not that I speak boldly because unconscious of my danger. I behold with an undaunted eye the melancholy vista opening before me; dethronement, — imprisonment, — a broken heart, — a premature grave, — and a blasted memory. He who can rend Christendom with a fatal schism, make the Church a double-headed monster

* “Alle sciagure da cui giaceva oppressa l’Italia, un’altra assai più grave se ne aggiunse nel funestissimo scisma, che per tanti anni divise e desolò miseramente la chiesa. Morto l’an. 1378 il pontef. Gregorio XI., che avea ricondotta a Roma la sede apostolica, ed eletto a succedergli, non senza qualche tumulto, Bartolomeo Prignani, arcivescovo di Bari, che prese il nome di Urbano VI., questi, colla eccessiva sua severità, fece ben presto pentire più cardinali, e i Francesi singolarmente, della elezione che aveano fatta.”

TIRABOSCHI, Tomo V., p. 14.

that distracts the consciences of the pious, — forget in his selfish ambition and unhallowed strife, that the voice of the heretic, Wickliff, cries scorn even from the shores of his own friendly England, — he, I say, will not hesitate to wreak his malice to the uttermost on a helpless female. Yet knowing all these things, I do hereby protest, that no creature of his shall ever mount the throne of Naples, while I have breath wherewith to oppose it, nor while the solemn voice of the dead can forbid it. I do hereby revoke the declaration I once made in favor of Charles of Durazzo, my adopted son and intended heir, declaring that his base subserviency to the designs of Rome, his impatient ambition and black ingratitude have forfeited my confidence and my affection ! And I do hereby transfer all my dominions in France and Italy, after my decease, to Louis of Anjou, late Regent of France, declaring him my sole lawful heir, and conjuring him to assert and make good his claim to rule my beloved people. As a pledge and memorial of my sincerity, worthy Baron de Rocroi, I call all present to witness, that I deliver into your hands this document, — the last will and testament of Joanna of Naples ; wherein the intentions I have so distinctly expressed are fulfilled. And now, — kind and true friends, — I would bid God speed you back to dear, happy Provence.

Begone, while the sea is calm, and before the hand of the spoiler is outstretched ; for the purposes of unjust men are more unsteady than the winds or waves. As for the disinherited Charles, — I loved him like a true woman, — faithfully, trustingly, to the last. I could not, would not believe him false till his own hand rent the bandage from my eyes ; and even now, I hate him not. I pity him, my friends, — I pity him ; for with agony of soul will he yet atone for the undeserved suffering, with which he has wrung this heart. Yet, — mark me ; — if ever you are told hereafter that I have admitted his unjust claims, believe it not ; even if they place before you an act signed by my hand, regard it as false or extorted from me by fraud or violence ; — believe it not ; — believe not your own eyes ; — believe nothing but these tears which I shed before you, — and avenge them ! ”

The Queen descended two steps, and delivered the roll of parchment into the hands of the Baron de Rocroi, who received it on his knee. He then rose, drew his sword, the other noblemen followed the example, and their manly voices rung through the hall, as they solemnly renewed their oaths of allegiance to their persecuted sovereign. This ceremony over, he approached to take a sad respectful leave of Joanna, and kiss her unsceptered hand. She bade them a kind farewell, and as they passed silently, one by one,

from her presence, the tones of that most touching voice yet ringing in their ears, unwonted tears rolled down their cheeks.

From the moment that the Baron de Rocroi had ascertained the state of affairs in Naples, he had resolved not to linger a day near its treacherous shores. The crews of his fleet had been permitted to land, only to take in a supply of fresh water, at which employment they had toiled through the night, and cool morning, and he had promptly demanded a safe conduct from Charles, which that prince had as readily granted, under the influence of his recent interview with Joanna. From her presence, therefore, the French chiefs returned to their ships, and prepared to sail as soon as the afternoon *Vento di Terra* should fill their canvass.

In the mean time Father Matteo, with equal despatch, had gone in pursuit of Durazzo, burning to communicate the intelligence of the Queen's proceedings, and to seize the moment for striking an important blow. Before he reached the Castello dell' Uovo, however, Charles had left it. Restless and unhappy, the victor of yesterday had wandered from place to place; and as he galloped with a small party of attendants to various parts of the city, under different pretexts, the perturbation of his mind was visible in his absent air and troubled countenance. It

was not till the afternoon, that the monk overtook him, just as he had returned to the Castello dell' Uovo, and stood on its battlements, watching the French galleys as they went down the harbor with a prosperous breeze filling every inch of their white sails.

"There they go!" said Durazzo, with a forced smile; "the officious intruders are glad to make us but a twenty-four hours' visit, and back they speed to gay France. If our last tidings be true, Anjou will find work enough for their ready blades on his own soil, without sending them to bluster in a woman's cause. I would he had despatched a few old minstrels and troubadours to cheer us in these anxious days; we would have shown them some royal courtesy."

"You have shown yon knaves more courtesy than beseems your interests, my son," said the monk, bitterly; "but their safe conduct would have availed them little, could I have traced you some hours sooner; it is too late now. You have sown the seeds of your own torment."

"What mean you?" exclaimed the Prince.

"I mean that the mischievous and malignant woman, whom you handle so gently, has prepared strife for your companion these many years! Yonder fleet galleys carry with them that which shall bring upon you fresh enemies, increasing difficulties, and unceas-

ing warfare! Know you not,—can you not guess, what precious document they transport to the hands of Anjou?”

Charles's countenance fell, but he stood mute.

“I tell you,” continued the monk, “the last solemn will of Joanna is in that bark, which leads the van so proudly. It makes Louis of Anjou her heir, and consequently bequeaths to you a goodly inheritance of strife and bloodshed. Inch by inch will you be forced to contend for these fair possessions, with the chance that, at last, the hand of your French competitor may rend the crown from your brows, so lately placed there by Urban himself. You came from Rome a newly made king; you may be driven back to it a hunted fugitive. These are the loving acts of Joanna towards you!”

“Have I deserved aught better at her hands?” asked Durazzo, turning deadly pale. “And yet—that she should make him her heir! how could I anticipate such a step?”

“Back, back to Venice!” said the monk; “there you were a man and a warrior. Your friends of Genoa have need of you; for men say that an aged magician hath brought up fire from hell to serve those desperate Venetians; and that with smoke and red flashes, he rains down balls of iron upon the Genoese

fleet.* Go back to Venice, my son ; think no more of fair Naples and its rich sovereignty ; and as you pass through Rome, stay only to render account to Urban of the massy church plate that he melted down, to hire fresh troops against this disobedient woman. Tell him you are no match for her wiles ; that you have not the spirit to curb her ;—that you have made her your prisoner, and dare not treat her as such. Tell him that she taunts and insults you to your face, and speaks of you with contemptuous pity ; yet goes free, and with mingled craft and haughtiness, lays her machinations for your future ruin, unmolested. Oh, blindness and infatuation most inconceivable ! Well may rumor whisper that she too deals in a dark,

* “ We may say, this was the most cruell warre that vntill that time euer was seen in the world : for, therein was artillery first of all vsed by the Venecians ; which was about the yeer of our Lord one thousand three hundred, eighty two, or a little while after. The inuention of this pestilent scourge of mankinde was attributed to the Germanes : some say that a Monk, who was a great Philosopher, found out the same ; not to that purpose to haue killed and slain men therewith, but with a desire to haue experimented the quality and naturall force of things. Others are of opinion, that it was one *Peter*, a great Magician : but it importeth little to knowe who it was ; for besides the ordinary Historiographers which I follow in this place, ther be many others write thereof.” — GRYMESTONE’S *Imperiall History*.

unhallowed science, which gives her more than human power."

"What would you have me do?" asked the perplexed and wavering Charles.

His ghostly father gazed steadfastly on his countenance, so full of wo and uncertainty, and then looking round at the page of Charles and other attendants, who stood almost within hearing, he sunk his voice to a stern whisper, and said;—"It was but yesterday, you threatened to smite the head from the shoulders of him who should speak of a prison for Joanna,—yet I dare do it."

The Prince started, and striking his hand against his forehead, turned from the monk abruptly, and strode away. Father Matteo looked after him earnestly, and said to himself,—“Aye, start at first! then look askance at the matter once more;—ponder;—become familiar with its aspect, and brood over it,—till reluctance vanishes, and you plunge forward with a blindfold desperation. I have her closely immured;—I am as sure of it as if I looked through the grated window of her prison.”

Durazzo left the battlements, instantly; but it was to return to his quarters in the city, where he shut himself up in his apartment for two hours. At the expiration of that time, Father Matteo was summoned,

as he had anticipated. The door was again closed, and their fearful conference protracted till the purple twilight descended over land and sea.

CHAPTER XI.

IN the mean time a message came from Joanna, requesting permission to visit her wounded husband. It met with a prompt refusal. Another arrived, demanding an interview with Durazzo himself. That too was refused. It was her heart's desire to solicit the return of her beloved niece, that she might have the consolation of a visit from her, in some neighboring convent; but indignant at the harsh incivility with which her requests were met, and judging rightly that it boded ill, she forebore to molest her conqueror farther, that night.

As the evening waned, no sleep sat heavy on her eyelids. She dismissed her weary attendants, and placed herself alone at a window of her chamber. The air was peculiarly still and sultry; the sky hazy; and the stars shone with a dim, reddish lustre, as if looking sadly down on a world where they witnessed so much sin and suffering. The monotonous sounds of the waves, continually washing against the Castle

walls, harmonized with the dejected state of the Queen's mind. She had observed that her own guard had been withdrawn, and sentinels substituted from the ranks of those fierce hireling mountaineers, by whose aid Charles had spread dismay in Naples. She felt herself a prisoner; and leaning out from her casement, looked wishfully down to some gardens beyond the fortress, whose myrtle groves and pleasant walks reached to the water's edge. There, indeed, an illumination, like the work of fairies caught her attention, for a few moments, as those glittering insects, which light up the summer evenings of Italy, flitted in myriads among the trees, emitting and concealing their silvery light with the regularity of machinery. The laugh of the thoughtless Neapolitans, who strolled in search of coolness at that late hour, came up occasionally to her ear; and she smothered a sigh as she thought, — "Yes! there is brightness, — there is joy yet in the world, though not for me. Are my sorrows so selfish that the thought cannot soothe their anguish? Oh no; — Charles! Charles! the parental heart mourning over the misconduct of the being it condemns and loves at once, cannot be selfish; and mine are the pangs of a disappointed mother. Little dost thou dream of them; deep and secret are the fountains of these gushing tears. My people too; beloved, unhappy people! what horrors of misrule

await ye! The heartless usurper must needs be a tyrant; he cannot, he will not study your welfare as I have done; and the wealth, that should be the handmaiden of religion, charity, and the people's good, will be wasted in bloody, ambitious wars, wherein ye have no concern. He cannot rejoice in the quiet arts of peace, with a guilty conscience forever struggling in his bosom; and unrighteous contention must be the element in which such troubled spirits move. Oh my son; my unhappy boy! my wretched people! my forlorn and suffering husband."

Forgetting thus the gloom of her own personal situation, in the sad prospects of those she loved, Joanna yielded in the solitude of night to that sorrow, which before the face of man she would have magnanimously suppressed; and laying down her head on the edge of the window, she wept freely. She was unconscious how the hours passed, for the abstraction of utter affliction, sometimes, like that of happiness, makes us forgetful of time. It was long past midnight, however, and repose at last seemed to have settled upon that populous and most restless city, when its stillness was invaded by a strange and awful sound. The Queen raised her head suddenly and listened. It was a low subterranean rumbling, as if a thousand chariots were driven through vaults far beneath the castle, jarring

the whole massy fabric; and as it approached from the west, and died solemnly away, her heart seemed to cease beating. It was hushed by awe, not terror; she knew the voice of the earthquake, which had spoken forth its deep accents not unfrequently during her reign; but seldom excited alarm, because unattended by serious consequences. It had only reminded the thoughtful, that though they dwelt under the bluest of skies, amid balmy breezes, with a soil beneath their feet so fertile that the whole country was a garden, yet that that soil was but a crust over a vast fiery abyss; a fact to which, every where, the black lavas of former calamity bore fearful testimony, and the craters of extinct volcanoes, visible at so many distinct localities, gave also their witness. The shock which had roused the Queen was not a severe one, and amid the innumerable noises of busy day might have passed unnoticed; but as she rose, she involuntarily looked towards Vesuvius. The mountain stood calm, silent, and majestic beneath the starlight; the long sleep of its fires was not yet broken. She remembered that in the beginning of the century the volcano in the isle of Ischia had been active; and though its lofty summit was hid by intervening objects, she turned to that quarter, half expecting to see the heavens glowing with the reflection of the red eruption; but there too the skies shone with their wonted

lights alone. It might have been produced by the distant operations of Stromboli, which, as she well knew, had been in a state of activity from time immemorial. But the current of the Queen's sad thoughts was now broken, and she gave herself up to those reflections on the omnipotence of the Almighty, which to intellects of a high order are so absorbing.

Lost in sublime reverie, she lingered at the casement without a thought of retiring; when another interruption called back her spirit from its musings. The red light of a torch appeared flaring among the trees, in one of the neighboring gardens already mentioned; and presently its bearer, evidently a stripling from the slightness of his figure, emerged from the shrubbery, which fringed the turf margin of the shore, and wandered along as if searching for something. He soon reached a cypress, whose drooping branches swept the water; and loosing a small skiff which was secured to its trunk, sprang in, pushed off, and plunged his flambeau into the sea. Its sudden extinction seemed to leave a total darkness behind; and the Queen, after listening some time in vain, was preparing to leave the window, when the dash of an oar caught her ear. She leaned out again, and was convinced that the boatman was approach-

ing under the castle walls with great caution ; and in a few moments more, he shot forth from their shadow, apparently satisfied that no sentinels were stationed along the water-side of the fortress ; and as the small bark glided silently on the dark waters opposite her window, she perceived that he stood up and made signs to her. Once she thought he raised his arms as if about to draw a bow ; but through the shades of night it was impossible to distinguish his gestures clearly. Aware that she herself was conspicuous at the window of a lighted apartment, she was persuaded that the stranger must probably recognise her person, and propose to hold conference with her ; but it was not till after watching some time, intently, that she perceived he was making signs for her to withdraw. She did so ; and the next instant an arrow came whizzing past her, and penetrating the oaken wainscoting of her apartment opposite the casement, remained quivering in the wood. Startled and amazed, she looked out again ; the youth and his boat were skimming the waves swiftly, and were soon lost in the gloom of night, once more leaving her in utter perplexity. On approaching the arrow, she found a slip of linen paper attached to it ; and the following words solved the mystery.

“ Most gracious Queen,

“ A secret and deadly foe plots your destruction, and rules the conscience of my poor master. They have held a conference to-night. I know its result, and have striven to rescue you. I had even bribed the rude Hungarian captain of your guard ; but when I came to claim admission, scarce an hour since, for the purpose of withdrawing you secretly to a place of safety, I found him trembling with superstitious terrors. The earthquake seemed to him a warning against the betrayal of his trust, and I was forced to retire and seek some method to warn you of your danger. They will come to you with propositions this night ; *seem* to yield, noble sovereign, or you will be hurried beyond the reach of aid. Gain time ; and by to-morrow night, abler heads may plot, and abler hands accomplish your flight.

“ GIOVANNI DEL MONTE.”

“ The page of Charles ! ” exclaimed Joanna to herself, — “ Strange, — strange are the chances of this world ! The evil for which we were prepared comes not, but sorrow lights upon us from some other quarter ; and so too, the staff we lean on breaks, and help is extended by a stranger’s hand ! Durazzo is my enemy, and takes counsel with the emissaries of Urban ; this unknown, humble boy rises up to com-

fort and protect a crowned Queen ! Noble youth ; — I will not peril thee. Thou shalt not entwine the thread of thy destiny with that of my dark and tangled fate, nor mingle in schemes that might bring thee to an early and bloody grave. I will use no artifice ; I will ask no delay ; I will face all dangers bravely, which threaten me alone.”

So saying, the high-minded Queen tore the paper into small pieces and cast them from the window. As she stood, with the arrow yet in her hand, uncertain how to dispose of it, a noise within the Castle broke on the universal stillness. It approached ; doors opened, and heavy feet came trampling on, along the marble floors. Shrieks from the ante-room were then heard, and two of her female attendants who slept there burst into her apartments with disheveled hair, and clung to her looking back with wild terror. The Queen, not entirely unprepared for this scene, stood motionless, as an armed knight presented himself on the threshold, apparently uncertain whether to advance. On seeing, however, that the Queen had not yet retired, but was standing completely dressed, beneath the antique golden lamp, suspended from the centre of her apartment, he stepped into the room with an air of deep respect. Behind him in the doorway appeared the grim faces of several Hungarian soldiers ; and as the knight

looked back impatiently, the cowed head of a monk presented itself also. The quick eye of Joanna discerned it, though in the dim back-ground ; and finding that the foremost intruder still hesitated, she said calmly, " I pray you, sir knight, approach, and summon hither the rest of your party, that I may know to whom I am indebted for a visit so well timed and courteous. How ! The Baron di Castiglione !— a brave and honorable knight, as I have been wont to think him !— and in his company the dark-robed, lowering Dominican I marked to-day, — and a band of foreign ruffians ! Pleasant and fitting guests to enter a Queen's chamber at this dead hour ! It is well that sorrow keeps vigils, or you might have chased gay dreams from my pillow. May I ask what midnight work hath been assigned you by your noble master ? "

" Most august Princess," began the Baron ; but Joanna interrupted him ; " Nay, spare the courtesy of soft words, good Baron, when the deeds are so rough."

The monk now came forward, planted himself before the Queen, threw back the cowl from his forehead, and fixing his sternest glance upon her, said in a harsh, imperious tone, " We come from Charles the Third, King of Naples, your sovereign and ours ;

and the business that brings us is of import too pressing to wait for daylight."

The Queen bowed her head slightly and said, — "I know whom you mean to designate by these titles. What is your master's pleasure?"

"That you sign this document," — returned the monk abruptly, extending to her a scroll.

Joanna took it, cast her eye over it carelessly, and dropping it on the floor, placed her foot upon it. Then drawing her proud figure up to its full height, she inquired, "Is this all? — Know you not that my declaration to the Barons of Provence renders all recantation useless? You were present at the interview; you heard my words. You were aware it would be an idle form to subscribe this worthless document; men would know it to have been extorted from me. Shame on Charles to palter thus! — What else doth he demand?"

"That you promise to attend the meeting of Italian nobles he will summon to-morrow, and there formally and publicly disclaim your proceedings of this morning, acknowledging yourself possessed of no right to wear or bequeath the crown of these realms."

"Hath Charles the shadow of an expectation that I shall so far lose my reason? — Tell him that if I obey his summons, it shall be to his sorrow; that if I come before the nobles of my country, it shall be to

declare my rights, to protest against his injustice and iniquity, to rouse the loyalty and chivalry which are sleeping,—not dead,—in the bosoms of belted knights. I will not deceive him. It would be my heart's wish to meet him face to face before the world, and make a solemn appeal to God and mankind. These wan cheeks,—the accents of truth and injured innocence,—his own accusing conscience and inward shame, would give me a power over the hearts of my hearers, that would reseal me on the throne of my ancestors. He knows it; he dares not trust me with such opportunity; he has no thought of it, and the mockery covers some further meditated wrong. What more?"

"The alternative," — said the Baron, in a low voice to Father Matteo; "tell her the alternative at once."

"There is an alternative then?" asked the Queen, with some eagerness.

"A prison in the Apennines," was the stern reply of the monk.

Joanna involuntarily uttered an ejaculation of dismay, and a brief pause succeeded; then folding her arms across her breast, and bowing her head, she said composedly, "I choose it."

"Most noble Joanna," exclaimed the Baron di Castiglione, "think well, I conjure you. What boots vain resistance? Why struggle with power that must

overmaster all opposition? Bend, while the storm goes by."

"Never! The reed in the valley may bend and escape destruction, but the pine on the mountain must break. The storm will not pass while Joanna cumbers the earth, unless the heart of the ambitious man again become that of a child, and he put away evil counsellors, that foster his ruling passions. Few, — very few of my own nobles has he bribed or subdued; those who are true to me shall never blush for the womanly faintheartedness of Joanna, nor say that she set them the example of subserviency. I reign in the hearts of my people; and therefore it is, that these hollow propositions are sent to me in haste and secrecy, that night may cover the approaching crime. Should he drag me a prisoner through the streets of Naples, beneath open day" —

"Time wears!" interrupted Father Matteo; "our messages are spoken, and her choice is made. Baron di Castiglione, she is your charge."

"Nay," said the Baron; "the business is too weighty for such unseemly despatch. Decide not so hastily, lady; the castles of the mountains are dreary abodes; and she who has reigned in the most luxurious court of Europe dreams not of the lonely, comfortless, heart-breaking hours that await her."

“Good Baron,” said the Queen, “I read in your eye the respectful compassion that my situation claims, and I thank you for it. Pity not me, however; pity rather your own deluded master. My choice is hasty, not rash. There are emergencies in life when thought rushes with unwonted rapidity through the brain, and the soul distinguishes right from wrong with the lightning glance of intuition. My principles have been years in forming; their operation is instantaneous. Bear me to my quiet prison; and believe not that Charles will be happier on an usurped throne, than I in my unjust confinement. Holy Father, tell him that as I have bequeathed to Louis of Anjou my dominions, to him I send this arrow; — so keen, — so barbed shall be the thought of Joanna in his bosom. I am ready. Is it not the Prince’s pleasure that we set forth to-night?”

“It is so,” answered the monk, “and every arrangement is made.”

“Aye,” said Joanna, “it was wisely done; the result of this visit was easily foreseen. My women, — are they not to accompany me?”

“Not one.”

The Queen changed countenance; and the cries of her attendants again broke forth at this harsh prohibition. “It is well,” said Joanna, recovering her self-possession; “I would not have my poor maidens

share my unkind fortunes, though the tenderness of my own sex, and the sympathy of those who loved me might have poured one drop of sweetness into the bitter cup. Farewell, my faithful friends! Pray for me. It would have been difficult to break my heart, if cheered in adversity by your affection, therefore you must stay. May you find no harsher mistress than I have been. Go to Margaret of Durazzo. They tell me she lies on a sick bed at Rome, but I know that my sweet niece is true to me yet. Carry her my blessing, and say, that could I have looked once more on her beloved face —— Lead forward, good Baron! it is no hour for tears!”

So saying, the Queen disengaged herself from the weeping women, who still clung round her person, wrapped herself in a large mantle and veil, and refusing to listen to farther expostulation from di Castiglione, followed the monk with a firm step from the apartment.

Lighted by torches, the party went down to the vaults of the Castle, and proceeding through damp passages, which the sunbeam had never reached, and whose solid masonry seemed to defy time and violence, they emerged from the very foundations of the building, at the water's edge. A large boat, well manned, was in waiting; and in a few moments more the Queen found herself bounding over the waves, that

bore her from a palace to a prison. The boatmen pulled vigorously, and as their course was due south, in less than two hours she was in the centre of that celebrated bay, the billows leaping about her with the white foam cresting their summits, as the night breeze swept over them; the glorious amphitheatre of lovely and classic hills rising indistinctly round nearly the whole horizon, — the heights of Capri and Ana-Capri with their neighboring promontory before her, becoming every moment loftier to the eye; Vesuvius on her left, calmly overlooking the whole region like a Queen; — and far, — far behind her, Naples, buried in repose and darkness, as it lay on the gracefully sweeping northern shore, its situation marked only by a few twinkling lights.

It was long after daybreak, when the party landed on the rocks, not far from Sorrento, near a spot afterwards chosen by the Jesuits for the convent of La Cocomella; and here a small troop of horse awaited them. In silence the Queen mounted, and without casting a glance toward the noble relics of antiquity which grace these shores, then far more perfect than the wandering antiquary of these days beholds them, she rode in the centre of her guards along the fine road, now covered by the encroaching waves. Avoiding the populous town, the Baron led the way at full speed across the fertile plain of Sorrento, where all

the fruits of summer clustered upon vine and bough over their heads; and the peasantry, coming forth to their morning labor, greeted them cheerfully as they passed, little dreaming, while the glittering party swept by, that their beautiful and unfortunate Queen rode there a disconsolate prisoner.

When they had ascended the first ridge of the mountains that approached the coast, Joanna profited by a momentary halt to look back; but the vast and magnificent prospect, that lay below, only called up agonizing remembrances. The remains of a noble Roman aqueduct, striding across the plain with its lofty arches; the white villages and gray ruins; groves of every shade of green; capes, islands, and the silver sea beyond all, fair in themselves, and hallowed by a thousand associations, were stretched forth under a cloudless sky and bright morning sun, that seemed to rejoice in the beauty he beheld; and her heart yearned over the whole region with a mournful presentiment that she should never more be gladdened by its loveliness, nor minister to the happiness of its population. On they went again, down the steep declivity; the whole fairy scene was shut from view, and eastward, before them, extended the green Campagna, to the foot of the eternal Apennines, rising in gloomy majesty to the very skies.

Towards the close of the next day, they paused near a monastery at the very base of the mountains. A tremendous pass opened before them, leading into wild, untrodden recesses, from whose depths a torrent came rushing down to the plains. The cliffs, which overhung the valley, sometimes gray and bare, sometimes shaggy with ancient forests of larch and pine, seemed to the inexperienced eye completely inaccessible; but far up among the crags, and perched on the very verge of a precipice, the turrets of a solitary fortress caught the rays of the setting sun. The evening mist already crept sluggishly along the stream winding in front of the monastery, and as the Queen watched the illumination of the loftier and more distant mountain peaks, visible above all nearer objects, the Baron di Castiglione approached her, and with a countenance full of sad meaning, pointed to the lonely Castle, uttering the words, "Il Muro." Joanna shuddered as she looked up earnestly at her future prison, but made no reply. Impatient to traverse their dangerous road before nightfall, the Baron allowed but a short halt at the monastery; yet while they pressed up the perilous ascent, the glowing west faded gradually away; the gloom of mighty forests hung over them; and Joanna felt that she was passing through toil and danger to a region beyond the reach of succor. More than once, their road lay along the side

of the mountain, which rose like a wall on one hand, while on the other, yawned a tremendous chasm; and the rude bridges, thrown by the mountaineers over the dashing waterfalls, shook at every step beneath their horses' feet. At last they stood in safety before the barbican of the Castle Muro. A blast of the horn, as in days of yet more ancient romance, was succeeded by death-like stillness; and then the mountain solitudes rung back the unfrequent sound with their clear, sweet echoes. Rude and dark were the towers which rose against the sky; and presently red torch-light flashed through their few windows. Bewildered and almost stupefied by the strangeness of her situation, Joanna was scarcely conscious when the gates were thrown open; and she crossed the drawbridge, the outer court, and was passing under the heavy gateway of the inner wall, when the harsh clang of the external gate, as it closed behind her, shutting out the world and all it held dear, smote on her heart like a death-knell. Then indeed the iron entered her soul; and the words "God help me" escaped her with a deep groan, as the captive Queen, amid a throng of wild, banditti-like soldiery, placed her foot on the threshold of her prison.

CHAPTER XII.

It were vain to attempt details of the trial, which now fell upon the persecuted Joanna. The weary monotony of a prisoner's day may be conceived ; but how very weary its unoccupied hours became to her, whose life had been devoted to constant and high employment, full of variety, full of incident, cannot be described. Her imprisonment was, in one sense of the word, solitary ; for though two or three females attended her to perform menial offices, and the commander of the garrison had access to her presence, she found them rough and ignorant almost to barbarism ; and the loneliness of the heart and intellect was total ; the affections of the one, the cultivation of the other, for a time, seemed wasted. The world was not then flooded with books, and none were sent to beguile the irksomeness of her existence. By a refinement of inhumanity, idleness was made part of the discipline intended to break her spirits. Thrown on the resources alone of her own mind, she found

Memory forever busy with the past, calling up its chequered scenes with cruel fidelity; while Hope shrank away, because the future had no bright spot to which she could point with her angel smile. The suddenness of the transition at first stunned and benumbed the Queen's energies; and there were hours when she felt that incessant musing, still thinking and thinking, without the slightest interruption to reflections so engrossing and bitter, would almost drive her to distraction. But hers was not a mind to be thus unhinged and shattered; and though there was nothing in her situation, which she could grasp at and convert into happiness, she sought refuge from madness in pursuits that could have claimed slight interest under other circumstances.

The love of nature, ever strongest in the most finely developed characters, did indeed sometimes win her from sorrowful contemplations, as she looked from her lofty turret window on the rugged, mountain scenery about the Castle Muro; and watched the effects of ever changing lights and shadows on the same immutable objects. It seemed to her, that the mere creation of clouds alone had filled the world with variety, and given to the broad skies perpetual novelty with their ever-shifting scenery; while the mountain peaks, sometimes shrouded in mists, sometimes glittering in sunshine, seemed almost to lose

their identity, so different was the aspect they wore under various states of the atmosphere. One window of her turret looked down the pass, and commanded a distant view of green fields, smiling like some calm, remote Elysium; the other opened to the east a prospect as rough and savage, as if formed only for the abode of the mountain blast, the torrent, and the wild bandit. Thence came the frequent hurricane, roaring fearfully as it passed down the gorge, and tearing up the young pines by the roots; while the aged trunks, that had withstood the storms of centuries, rocked with all their mighty branches in the gale. There too, in the summer mornings, she watched the timid ibex, that inhabitant of earth's upper regions, tossing her fantastically twisted horns, as she glided along the edge of some aerial cliff, or led her young to drink of the brooks that gleamed through the trees. The autumn saddened around her at last; and one morning she looked forth and the mountain tops were white with snow. Then came on the horrors of the long,—long winter. Its inclemences reached her; the fierce music of its storms howled round her lofty dwelling, as she lay thinking of the absent; and apparently forgotten both by friend and foe, she suffered on for months, silently and patiently, hoping that the frail dust, which held her spirit in such bondage, would at length dissolve;

and that the wild flowers of the mountains would blossom with the breath of spring upon her grave.

Strong as her mind was by nature, it had derived fresh strength from the development of the religious principle, during her hours of solitary reflection, where God spoke to her through his sublimest works; and all idle forms and pomps, devised by man, came no longer between her soul and its Maker. The purest exercises of devotion, in which her spirit addressed itself spontaneously to the Best of Beings, for protection and support, had become familiar to her mind; and without a thought of heresy, her faith had been ripened by circumstances, and was in advance of the age in which she lived. The tenets of Lollardism had indeed reached her ear; but it was her own vigorous reason that had thus taught her to improve her unsought opportunities of meditation. In those moments of weakness and despondency, to which human nature is ever liable; when the faces she best loved haunted her waking dreams, until homesickness seemed to melt her very soul; then came too that consoling confidence in Infinite Goodness, which had been born of wise reflections on past events. Happy are those to whom a pause in life's bustle is allowed, that they may ruminate and learn for themselves, how various are the garbs which mercy wears; how inexhaustible the resources against

sorrow, which are granted in the privilege of addressing ourselves to our Father in Heaven. The heart of the Catholic Queen became filled in her solitude with the piety expressed in these later days from a New England pulpit, with such beautiful simplicity, "Can he murmur who can pray?"

As the spring opened, more than one haughty message from Durazzo broke upon her solitude, demanding written concessions and acknowledgments, which her sense of duty still forbade; and she refused compliance in a tone of calm dignity and with an imperturbable sweetness of manner, which astonished and melted his ambassadors. No murmur or reproaches escaped her lips; no petitions for relief molested her conqueror; no vehemence marked her deportment. Resignation, not sullenness, was in that tranquil air; and though her aspect showed that she had suffered, those who held intercourse with her by the command of Durazzo, left her with a feeling of deep, involuntary reverence, for one who seemed exalted rather than crushed by earthly calamity.

In the mean time, a winter of wretchedness had passed over the usurper's head. Opposition and difficulty had met him at every turn. The crown sat uneasy on his brows; for not one moment of peace had his bosom known, since the coveted prize had been won. Continually in arms against the enraged nobil-

ity of the kingdom, who, with few exceptions, had embraced the cause of Joanna; harassed by the demands of Urban, who imperiously claimed the promised domains of Capua for his nephew, which it was out of his power to bestow; shut out from domestic enjoyment, by the illness of his wife at Rome, and the unsettled state of his affairs; domineered over by his Confessor, who had ascertained the weak points of his character, and, made insolent by success, played on his ambition, his superstition, and his impetuosity, with masterly skill, Charles became daily more eager for power, more reckless of the means by which it might be gained, more remorseless as he looked back on the steps already taken. The gentler traits of his moral constitution were obliterated, one by one, as he rushed along his downward and bloody career. His cheerfulness vanished; his temper became soured; his heart grew heavy and cold, and the open smile of his earlier and better days was gone forever from his countenance. Unable to shake off the irritating consciousness of his guilt, yet panting still for its fruits, the gallant Prince of Durazzo was fast becoming the selfish, relentless tyrant. So the opening spring of 1383 found the conqueror of Joanna.

It was early in the month of April, that Francis Prignano, or Butillo, as he is styled by some historians, the nephew of Urban, returned to Rome after a

long excursion, and accidentally learned that the Princess of Durazzo yet lay there, the victim of some lingering malady. The threat of his cruel relative flashed on his recollection, and a feeling of compassion for the youthful sufferer stirred his heart. Urban was absent from the city, and the opportunity was not to be lost. A secret intimation was conveyed to the Princess's trusty attendants; the prescriptions of the Pope's physicians were neglected, and before the return of his Holiness, the evident amendment in the strength of the Princess allowed them to transport her privately from his dominions, and she was conveyed to the genial atmosphere of Baiæ. Here her health rapidly improved.

It was at this period, that the aged and palsy-stricken Wickliff was lifting up a voice from his retirement at Lutterworth, which rung more clearly through Christendom, as the hour approached which was to hush its accents forever; and this too was the year, in which the hot-headed, young Henry Spencer, bishop of Norwich, undertook his mad crusade in favor of Urban, against the Lollards in Flanders; while the schism which so fatally degraded the dignity and lessened the power of the Catholic church went on fiercely, and the Pope of Rome, engrossed with so many other cares, had no leisure to think of protracting the separation of Margaret from her husband. Father

Matteo rejoiced that, while Charles was fighting in the southern part of his dominions, against rebellious Barons, she was not likely to seek him; and she, thus overlooked, in her hours of convalescence, unceasingly laid fond plans to reclaim her unhappy lord to the paths of honor, duty, and virtue; so hard is it for woman to credit the utter extinction of good principles, in the heart she has prized; so true is it, that the veriest reprobate may find in the bosom of mother or wife, something that still hopes and pleads, when all mankind beside may have delivered him over to his sins and their consequences!

The tumultuous state of the country kept her for some time inactive; but at last, tidings reached her, that Durazzo had been defeated in a severe skirmish among the Calabrian wilds, and was about to return to Naples. She determined to set forth, without delay, and accompanied by a strong escort, to meet him near the mountains, which encircled the Castle Muro. In this hour of defeat and discouragement, she trusted that an appeal to his reason and his heart, in the very neighborhood of his august captive, might unbar the gates of that prison, give back their Queen to a distracted people, restore peace to her husband, and long forgotten happiness to herself.

The gloom of twilight was fast obscuring the landscape round the monastery of Santa Maria, on the

evening of May the twenty-first, when the dispirited and weary troops of Durazzo came filing through the mountains south of the plain. They were to halt for the night near the base of those cliffs, which were crowned by the gray turrets of Il Muro; and Charles, acquainted with the localities of these regions, approached to take possession of the quiet little monastery, which stood in the centre of the plain, without daring to look up at the prison of his benefactress, as it frowned on him from the heights, which, on the east, bounded the level grounds. His march had been hurried and toilsome; for the snows, melting among the Apennines, aided by heavy rains, had swoln every brook to a torrent; and the roads, at all times steep and rough, had been rendered almost impassable by masses of earth and rock and fallen trees, strewed over them by the waters and winds. He followed in the rear of his troops, mounted on a jaded horse, who stumbled with fatigue under his master, as he descended the last hill that swept down to the plains; and with his head sunk on his breast, the rider vented the moodiness of his mind in frequent ejaculations of impatience at the worn out animal. Changed,—changed indeed was the whole outward aspect of that warrior, within one short twelvemonth. He was clad yet in the complete steel, whose fashion had just superseded that of mail, when the introduction of

artillery threatened to render it as useless as it was cumbrous ; but he no longer bore himself aloft, with the noble, chivalrous air of his more virtuous days. The solid helmet pressed no more heavily on his brows than of yore ; but he was weighed down by the consciousness of guilt, which lay on him as a mighty burden, and still more by that which he deemed a *necessity* for crimes yet more fearful. His closed visor hid a face darkened by the terrible meditations of his soul.

His evil genius came to meet him under the ominous shadows of the primeval forest ; Father Matteo had awaited him for some hours at the monastery, and now rode forth to communicate tidings, which were of no small import.

“What is that you say ?” exclaimed Durazzo, starting from a sullen reverie ; “Louis has crossed the Alps ? — and with what force ?”

“Rumor tells so wild a story,” answered the priest, “that we can lend her little credit. They say the plains about Bologna shake under the tramp of thirty thousand cavalry.”

“Impossible ! impossible !” cried Charles, “unless some wily sorcerer hath called up armed knights and chargers from the ground, to take the field for Anjou.”

"Aye," resumed the monk, "and whirled them through the air across those Alpine barriers. But allowing for all probable exaggerations, we may well fear that he brings with him a force sufficient to accomplish his avowed object."

"And what may that be, if not to war on us?"

"His immediate purpose is to release Joanna from her confinement."

Durazzo's gesture indicated his surprise and anger, but he made no reply.

"There are tidings also from the city;" continued Father Matteo, after a brief pause. "I left it because I saw that the *Wild Horse** of Naples grew restive; and a courier, this afternoon, brought news of an insurrection among that idle and innumerable populace."

"We will carry them snow balls from the mountains," said Durazzo, with a sneer; "it is easy to cool the fever of Neapolitan patriotism with a little iced water."

Father Matteo shook his head. "Their Queen Joanna, as they style her, still sits on an invisible throne in the bosom of each poor man in the city. The affections are spiritual, my son, and you will find it hard to use sword and lance against these shadowy opposers."

* An emblem on the banner of the Neapolitan populace.

"Peace! I pray you, good father;" exclaimed Charles; "I will take order with these lounging knaves. Came not Castiglione with you to meet me?"

"He hath declared against you."

"He? — di Castiglione!" cried the usurper, with unconcealed dismay; — "the man I have trusted again and again! He that has fought battle after battle by my side! I gave him charge of my wife, when she came, last year, to meet me; I commissioned him to carry yonder headstrong woman to her cage, because I thought his gentle courtesy fitted him for such task; but I deemed him true as steel. Are you well advised of what you say?"

"I am;" replied the monk, with a laconic coolness, which was peculiarly irritating to his fiery companion.

"And what more? Come, — these are all refreshing tidings after a defeat and a weary day's journey. Have you no more blessed news for me? I shall sleep soundly after these anodynes."

"Di Castiglione has tampered with the barons, who gave you the preference over Anjou, because, they said, no Frenchman should wear the crown of Naples; and three of them, — the very three whom you lately sent with propositions to yonder Castle, — have joined him in his revolt."

“So, so ; our prospect brightens apace ! She has but to look upon my best followers with her proud smiles, and the bonds of their allegiance dissolve. I think we will send her no more messengers ; no more false-hearted barons ; *you* shall deal with her, good father. Were it not wise ? ”

“They say,” resumed the priest, “that the hardships of this winter have undermined her health ; that she hath been ill.”

“Ill ! ” repeated Durazzo, his dark eye flashing through his visor. “You have spoken one word of pleasing import at last. She is of flesh, — and all flesh must fade ; she will not live forever. Aye, aye ; when she perishes from my path, all other obstacles will shrink aside, or be as nothing. What is her malady ? ”

“Men will call it a broken heart ; a tedious disease, my son.”

“Is that all ? ” asked the Prince impatiently ; — “hath she no burning fever ? — no wasting consumption in her blood ? — nothing that promises her a speedy deliverance from those high walls ? ”

“Nothing of that sort. I said she *had* been ill ; but it was some slight, passing distemper, that hath already left her ; the rumor thereof, in all likelihood, will excite fresh sympathies in her behalf. If the eagles of the air carry her tidings of all that is un-

dertaken for her release, she will begin a new life; for the hope of freedom is an efficient cordial for the sick captive."

"Freedom!" muttered the chieftain; "there is but one freedom for her."

"I would her sickness had been unto death," said Father Matteo; "at this crisis it might have been your salvation."

He made this remark thoughtfully, and with a side glance endeavored to observe its effect on his companion, but the sudden halt of the Prince startled him. The flush of sunset had long since died away, but a pale, amber light yet lingered on the western horizon; the new moon and the evening star hung there, side by side; and as the two riders emerged from under the trees, Charles, turning upon his companion, threw up his visor, under the soft radiance of that most beautiful hour. Never was there a more fearful contrast with the tranquillity of nature. If the iron frame of that monk could have shaken with human feeling, he would have trembled as he looked on the dreadful expression of Durazzo's features. "Father Matteo!" said the unhappy man, in a low hollow voice; "look on me and read what is in my heart! You have the fiend-like power to penetrate its gloomy recesses, and call its unformed purposes of evil into being. Tell me how to shape its present designs!"

The crafty monk saw that he was no longer called on to suggest iniquity, but to aid in its accomplishment; the triumph of the Prince of Darkness was complete over the once struggling victim, and the work was nearly done. With wary hesitation he gazed on the Prince irresolutely, as if uncertain how to understand him; but Charles exclaimed more vehemently, — “Why do you not answer me? You do, — you must comprehend! Is there more than *one* deed that hath no name?”

“My son,” replied the monk, “I have said that the death of Joanna would be your salvation; do I understand you now?”

Durazzo shuddered and looked round wildly, as the night breeze came rustling through the forest behind them. “Who goes there?” cried he; “have we not listeners in the coppice?”

“No,” said the monk calmly; “you are agitated, my brave Prince. Be composed, and let us talk deliberately of your affairs. They are in an unpromising state assuredly; the juncture is perilous.”

“Perilous!” interrupted Charles, “it is desperate; it drives me wild. I tell you, the storm breaks from every quarter at once, and I will endure its buffetings no more. That woman” — and he ground his teeth and raised his gauntleted hand towards the dark mountain, where a twinkling light pointed out the

turret of Joanna, — “that woman is a thorn in my side, — an arrow in my flesh, — a canker at my heart’s core. Her influence comes out from her solitary cell, and baffles me every where, winning prince and peasant by the mere magic of her name. While that proud heart of her’s throbs with life, there is neither peace nor prosperity for her successor; no stability for his throne; no security for his days. See you not this, father?”

“I have seen it long,” replied the monk.

“And can I bear it?”

“Not if you are a man, with energy enough to snap the mere cobweb that entangles you.”

“I could burst chains of forged steel! It is not the rage of a moment, that nerves my arm. No, — good priest; — for many days and nights past, my mind has been working, — working, — taking deadlier hues from the troubles that darkened around me. And though I dared not look steadfastly on my own purposes, as they flickered like horrid phantoms in the void of the future, — I knew to what I must come. I rode, last night, among these savage mountains till day break; and what think you banished hunger, thirst, fatigue? — What followed, at my horse’s heels, wailing in my ears continually, as we trampled along the rocky defiles? — Some unseen demon, — good father, — whispering murder! murder! all the livelong night.”

The priest smiled ; — “ This form of phrensy bodes some spirited deed, I acknowledge,” said he ; “ but the how, — the when, — the where, — if your courage hold ? ”

“ They must be matters of prudent deliberation,” said the Prince ; ” and as soon as I have crushed these gnats at Naples ” —

“ Pardon me,” interrupted the monk ; “ there is yet another item of intelligence I had well nigh forgotten. The Queen comes to meet you ! ”

“ The Queen ! ” repeated Durazzo ; — “ what Queen ! ”

“ The Queen Margaret, — your royal consort.”

“ And what brings her into these wild mountains ? Why has she not waited my summons ! These are no times for itinerant Princesses, when lances scour the country in every direction. What seeks she ? ”

“ I hear her errand is to solicit the liberation of your prisoner.”

“ Is it so ? We will not encounter her soft pleadings ; we will take another road.”

“ You cannot well avoid her ; she and her train lodge, this night, at Capanna. It was her purpose to meet you here ; but the weariness of her children compelled her to halt at ten miles’ distance, and she will join you early to-morrow morning.”

“ She must not ; — she shall not ! ”

"Nay," said the monk; "it may matter little. She may come too late."

"How? — how so?" asked Charles, somewhat bewildered.

"Why," replied Father Matteo, "your prisoner has had a most well timed indisposition, of late. It may return, — it may prove fatal, — it may save your fair Queen the trouble of those eloquent expostulations from which you shrink."

"To-night? — do you mean this very night?" asked Charles in a whisper, again looking fearfully round, as if conscious that the very stones of the valley ought to cry out against such foul conspiracy.

"Is not your purpose fixed," said his companion; "is not the deed to be done? Is not your condition such as to make it not only a matter of policy, but necessity? Will you have the folly and feebleness to procrastinate for a single day the one bold stroke, which cuts the knot of your embarrassments? — Shun not this Queen of yours; it would excite suspicion. Let her come hither to-morrow morning. Meet her boldly, and let her hear the message which will come down from Il Muro, before the dew is off the grass. Take my counsel once more, my son; for if you have not the courage to do, *at once*, what you perceive to be fitting, it will never, — never be done; and your destruction is at hand. Mark my words. I have not

prompted you to the deed ; but I declare that nothing else can save you. I offer to conduct the transaction with such secrecy, that the world shall never cry aloud, — *Charles did it*. Stealthy whispers, — vague surmises may be stifled ; — as yonder fair-spoken Joanna might testify, from the dark experiences of her own early life.”

“ Priest ! priest ! ” exclaimed Charles, “ tell me one thing ; tell me truly. Was it not all foul calumny ? Is her conscience heavy with a husband’s blood ? Do *you* believe it ? ”

“ I *do* ; ” replied the monk with solemnity.

Durazzo looked him earnestly in the face, a moment, and then his head sunk on his breast as he groaned aloud. “ I do *not* ; ” said he. “ Would to God that I could. I would give half this realm to know that there was a shadow of just retribution in this dreadful measure ; to feel myself the avenger of innocent blood ; but it cannot be ! My conviction of her blameless uprightness rests on the close intercourse of years, when in the free unguarded communion — Let us speak of it no more. Her soul will need few masses, when I have sent it to the long account, — and mine, — good father, — you will shrive me ! You will give me absolution ! Blessed be the power of the Church ; there is no crime beyond the reach of its mercy.”

“Crime!” said the monk impatiently; — “what speak you of crime? Could you do the Church better service, than by thrusting this rebellious and malignant child out of existence? Is not the seal of perdition upon her? Look for wreaths of gold and palms of glory, my son; for you do but perform the will of Heaven in this matter. Blind and ignorant men might cast censure on you, therefore let it be a deed of privacy and darkness; but from the great Head of the Church, from Urban himself, approbation, assistance, and all manner of favor will descend upon you. Trust me; he that lays low the haughty head of Joanna does God and man service.”

During this conversation, the two riders had resumed their journey, and had now reached the southern bank of the stream, which meandered through the valley from east to west. The monastery of Santa Maria stood on the opposite side, and farther up; but the only access to it was over a slight wooden bridge which they were approaching; and as they caught the glimmer of its waves, dancing in the moonbeams, they perceived the river was swollen, till the water laved the very edges of the rough planks, and at times washed across them. Branches and even trunks of trees, hurried along by the rapid current, were accumulating on the upper side; and after reconnoitering it a few moments, as they halted

under the willow trees, Durazzo and his companion crossed it singly and cautiously, lest it should be swept from under them. Soon afterwards, finding themselves among the soldiery, they postponed their fearful theme, till Charles had taken possession of a friar's cell in the monastery. There, forbidding all intrusion, he summoned his Confessor to his side again; and there, — in that quiet retreat of simple piety, shut in by stone-walls, which had been raised to exclude all earthly temptations from its tenants, and surrounded only by the emblems of religion, he resumed the unhallowed consultation. We will follow its details no more.

In the mean time the page of Charles, who had been sent forward by his master to the monastery, before the sun set, had become impatient and anxious, on seeing that the waters continued to rise, as evening came on; and he had gone back to meet him. Crossing the little bridge, he had sat down beneath the willow trees, and almost exhausted by the fatigues of the recent march, as he awaited his master, he looked up at the stars, shining through the long, slender, waving branches, with eyes that, in spite of himself, closed in momentary slumber. In vain he struggled against it, straining his ears to catch the distant tread of horse. The waves murmured by him, with a most lulling sound; the tall sedges, not yet under

water, rustled in the breeze; the gleaming light from the tower of Muro, on the mountain, seemed to recede and become a star in the dark sky; and all things gradually assumed a shadowy and dreamy aspect, till a profound sleep fell irresistibly on his eyelids. He woke not till roused by the tramp of steeds close at hand; and as he started up, the harsh voice of Father Matteo struck his ear, uttering the too intelligible words, — “*He that lays low the head of Joanna does God and man service.*” His blood ran cold, — he remained immovable, — concealed in deep shadow; while his master and the monk, unconscious of his presence, debated on the security of the bridge, finally crossed it and rode out of sight, leaving him petrified with dismay, as he pondered on the ominous words. His resolution was soon taken. He knew that Margaret was at Capanna; and rushing once more over the tottering bridge, with a fleet, light step, he procured a horse among the officers, pretending that he was despatched by his master, and instantly took the road down the river side, to the village. It was not necessary to cross the stream again; and long before midnight, he stood in the presence of the amazed wife of Durazzo.

She heard his tale with speechless horror; and then repelled with indignation the suspicion that her lord would yield to suggestions so barbarous.

“ You know him not, as he now is ! ” exclaimed the youth ; “ believe me, gentle lady, my beloved master is an altered man. You have not watched, as I have done, the terrible change stealing over him for months past ; his temper, — his heart, lady, — so hardened. Come to him, I implore you ! you alone can soften it ; you alone can counteract the influence of that dreadful priest. Have mercy on your husband and on the royal captive ! ”

The agitation of Giovanni could not be witnessed without exciting some sympathetic alarm, and Margaret, at last, assented. “ If you warned me that he was but threatened with a dangerous malady, I should fly to him ; surely the evil that endangers soul, instead of body, is more fearful ; — and it may be, — it may be, — that he yields. Holy Virgin ! aid me ! I will go.”

Leaving the greater part of her train to follow with her children next day, Margaret left Capanna at midnight, and rode up the river banks, under the protection of Giovanni and a few chosen horsemen. Sad and silent was the little journey. The road in many places was covered with water, so that the party were obliged to take higher ground, forcing their way through thick aloes, while every moment of delay seemed intolerable to those, whose anxiety and impatience increased the more they reflected on the

circumstances in which Durazzo was placed. Giovanni observed with pleasure that the surface of the stream was covered with wrecks, which testified that the force of the current had carried away the bridge, nearly opposite the monastery;— and when they reached the spot, he pointed out the fact to his royal mistress, assuring her that the destruction of the bridge must have prevented all passage to the road that led up among the mountains.

“He can have sent no messengers to Il Muro, this night;” said the page, with a lightened heart, as he assisted the trembling lady to dismount at the convent gate. The door was opened, before they had demanded admittance; but it was to give egress to a tall, dark figure, which started back at first, on meeting them; and then, with muffled face, passed hastily out, and disappeared in the gloom. Giovanni looked suspiciously and anxiously after it; and then urged the admission of the Queen to her husband. It was in vain. The friars obstinately refused to disturb the Prince, who had expressly forbidden all intrusion upon his solitude, that night; and the vehemence of the youth, the pathetic entreaties of Margaret were alike wasted. She was, however, conducted to a cell, and there left alone, by a monk whose charity and hospitality could carry him no farther. Repose she

could not ; but as she kneeled at her devotions, awed by the stillness which prevailed, ere long, through the cells and cloisters of the whole building, it seemed to her that something stirred near her door. A soft tap was presently heard, and as she opened it, an aged friar presented himself, with a light in his hand. " Daughter," said he, " I was once in the world till its sorrows drove me hither. I had a wife, as young, — beautiful, — and loving as thou art ; and while she walked with me on earth, she made me a better man. For the sake of her memory, dim in my soul for many years till this night, I will lead thee to thy husband. Use thy influence well, daughter, — for therefore did God bestow it. Beauty is a holy gift, and the woman, that views it aright, forgets vanity and trembles at her responsibility." So saying, the mild old man, with a noiseless step, moved along the passage, and placing the lamp on the floor, near a door which stood ajar, he cast one more compassionate glance at the fair creature, who trembled as she approached a husband's presence, and whispering, — " Linked to a man of blood, — I pity thee ! " he withdrew.

Margaret paused for a few minutes to summon strength ; — not a sound came from the apartment ; a light glimmered within ; but it seemed as if the repose of death must be there. Arousing all her

courage, she at length pushed the door open, slowly, and stood on the threshold. The bare walls within were feebly lighted by a candle, waning in its socket. As its blaze rose and sunk, uncertain shadows flickered about the room, and the mournful effigy of a suffering Savior, which hung on the wall, seemed its only occupant. Margaret took up her own lamp and advanced a few steps, when she discovered the prostrate figure of her husband, stretched on a rude pallet of straw in a corner. "He sleeps!" thought she joyfully; "*could* he sleep if he purposed such a crime?" Her reflections were broken by a convulsive shudder, which passed over the limbs of Durazzo, and a stifled groan. "It is troubled sleep," — she thought again; and placing her lamp on the rough table, she drew near him, and perceived that his attitude was not that of slumber. His face was buried in the pillow; his hands locked over his head, as if he had thrown himself down in agony. She stooped, and softly whispering, — "Charles!" she touched one of those burning hands with hers. At that sound and touch he sprang up on his knees, and glared on her with a livid face, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets. Appalled and speechless, she stood trembling, till in a hoarse and almost inarticulate voice he demanded, — "Margaret! is it Margaret?"

"Surely, — it is your wife," replied she; "none other would dare come to your side unbidden; — but oh Charles! is it thus you welcome me? Do you not know me, beloved?"

His eyes wandered about so wildly, that for an instant a surmise of his insanity crossed her mind, and she retreated a few paces, when he leaped up, and seating himself on the side of the couch, placed his hands before his face, as if striving to recollect himself, — "Margaret here!" said he again, — "and how is that? Whence came you?"

"From Capanna," replied the Princess; "have I done wrong to seek my lord uncalled? O my beloved husband! we meet not as we once did!"

"And I am not what I was!" cried Charles, in a softened tone; and as he looked on her steadfastly a few moments, the wildness passed from his eyes; they even filled with tears. "Beautiful, — though pale! — sweet and gentle as ever!" said he. "'Thou hast been ill, my wife; — and our separation has been long!" He held out both his hands to her, and she threw herself on his neck, weeping without restraint. Again and again she attempted to speak, but a fresh burst of emotion checked her words; and Charles held her in silence, till the violence of her feelings was expended. When she became calm, she rose and looked in his face, smiling through her tears with

the same innocent expression he remembered so well, in the April days of her childhood; but a change had passed over his countenance; — the demon was there again. He almost threw her from him as he cried, — “Smile not on me, Margaret! what have I to do with angels? — Go, go! — leave me! It is my pleasure to be alone. Gave I not orders” — Margaret clasped her hands supplicatingly and again approached him; but in a voice of thunder he repeated, “Leave me, I say! what brought you hither? — who gave you entrance?”

“Dearest, — dearest!” said Margaret, still courageously drawing closer to the frantic man, though he lifted his clenched hand, as if actually about to deal a furious blow on her temples. Such daring, in a creature so soft and naturally so timid, smote him with a nameless sensation, that overpowered all wild passions, and he remained immovable, till she imperceptibly sunk at his feet, threw back the dishevelled locks from her face, embraced his knees, and remained with upturned countenance, mutely imploring forbearance, such tenderness beaming from her eyes, that a heart of stone must have been melted.

His arm dropped. “Margaret! Margaret!” said he, “thou hast grown bold! Whence comes this new-found courage?”

Do I not love thee, Charles?”

“ Even yet, — my wife ? ”

“ Till death.”

“ No, — no, — no ! deceive not thyself ; thou canst not love me always. Were I unworthy of thee, couldst thou love me ? ”

“ Thou shalt *not* be. It was to ward off evil, beloved, that I came hither. Thou *hast* erred much, and they told me that temptation had again beset thee ; therefore nothing had power to daunt me, — to keep me from thy side. O Charles ! the deeds thou hast done since we parted are dreadful, — but it is not too late to retrieve all ; not too late to repair the wrong and be again happy.”

“ Woman ! woman ! ” cried Durazzo, fiercely ; “ thou knowest not what thou sayest ! For what purpose camest thou hither, demon in a seraph’s shape ? To mock me ? — to hiss at me ? What brought thee hither, I say ? ” He gazed on her with fixed eyeballs, and from the darkened corner in which he stood, they glared like a tiger’s ; but he no longer beheld a quaking suppliant, ready to sink at his feet.

Some new feeling had rushed over the mind of Margaret, and though she became pale as marble, she stirred not, she trembled not, but met his maniac stare with an expression of countenance he had never seen her wear before. “ Charles,” said she, “ I came hither to save thee from thyself. Why do I

find thee mad, — mad, my husband? What crime hast thou been ruminating upon, by the midnight lamp, till thy noble reason is almost unseated? Think of it no more; — think only of me. Rejoice that I have come between thee and thy meditated crime.”

Charles gnashed his teeth and rapidly muttered in a low tone, — “Art thou not come too late?”

“The words had hardly struck her ear, when Margaret disengaged herself from him, sprang to the centre of the room, and turning upon him a face of horror, asked in a whisper, fearfully distinct, “Am I the wife of a murderer? — Stand back till I am answered. Heaven breaks our vows if it be so.”

“Then they are cancelled!” was the half suffocated answer of Durazzo.

Margaret uttered not a word; the veins in her forehead swelled, and she gasped for breath.

Charles suddenly rousing himself from his stupor exclaimed, “What have I said?” Margaret! — Margaret! believe it not. Did I say I had murdered her? No, — no, — she lives yet, — it may be. *I* have struck no blow.”

“Durazzo!” said the Princess, “trifle not with me. What *hast* thou done? It is remorse that almost maddens thee, and think not to keep thy fatal secret from a wife. The guilt undivulged for years will escape thy lips, and cast thee from me at some

future hour of agony; for never, — never will I knowingly share the fortunes of — Oh Charles! I cannot utter that fearful word again. Tell me; what hast thou done?"

Still Durazzo sat in sullen silence. The suggestions of the page flashed on her mind. "Hast thou sent orders to yonder mountain to-night?" she asked. The look with which he answered her told enough; and clasping her hands, she cried in a tone of joy, — "Heaven be praised! I have *not* come too late. No message can have passed that swollen stream, and oh! my husband! thou art saved from anguish unutterable and eternal."

"What mean you?" exclaimed the bewildered Durazzo.

"That God hath interposed, — that the wild work of the elements hath been merciful to thee. The bridges have been swept away; and if thou hast indeed been in the power of evil spirits, and hast sent bloody commands to Il Muro, they cannot have been transmitted."

Charles rose, but stood perplexed, his faculties confused by a revulsion of feeling so unexpected. "Art thou sure?" asked he, at last, abruptly.

"I saw the wrecks with my own eyes," replied Margaret; "I saw the stream unspanned by the handiwork of man, as it hurried foaming through

the plain; and your own page told me, no man could have crossed it this night."

"But he will seek a passage higher up," said Durazzo.

"Then fly! fly at once!" — exclaimed the Princess; "whoever may be your bloody courier, he must have met with embarrassment and delay; he may be overtaken. Oh Charles! I found thee in purgatory, but if there is paradise on earth, thou shalt know it to-morrow night, when looking on thy bloodless hands. She, who loved us so fondly will forgive thee, — Oh, speed! speed! why dost thou delay!" —

"Down, busy fiend!" muttered Durazzo to himself, still fixing his eyes on the floor, a dark and terrible irresolution sitting on his brow.

"Thou dost not hesitate?" cried Margaret, astonished and terrified. "Then Satan is indeed here, though mine eyes behold him not. Good saints and angels, defend us!"

"Margaret," said Durazzo, "her life is my earthly ruin, — my death!"

"Believe it not!" cried Margaret, something of Joanna's noble spirit flashing from her beautiful face; "it is the foul fiend that whispers it; and what if it be so? Come death; come any thing but guilt and eternal remorse! Husband of my youth, rather would I hang over thy bloody corse and know that those

beloved eyes would never look on me again, so that thou diedst innocent of this foul, irreparable crime! Then, the memory of thy virtues would minister comfort. Let me rather wear the widow's garment of mourning than live to shudder at thy approach!"

"Callest thou this the language of love?" said Charles, bitterly.

"Aye, of love the purest, — the most exalted! love that adores — hopes — pleads to the last, — contending and struggling with Sin itself, for thy salvation. Love that is quicksighted to thy true dignity and happiness! Love that foresees thy coming agony of remorse, and trembles even at the earthly retribution that will overtake thee: — love that clings to thee on the very brink of a precipice! When thou *hast* fallen, — then indeed, virtuous love must forsake thee, a ruined and degraded wretch. Start not! Since all higher appeals fail, hear this! — Wife as I am, — fond and faithful wife, — mother of thy children, — Durazzo, I declare to thee, that, polluted with the murder of a benefactress, the cold-blooded — ungrateful — deliberate assassin shall forfeit all reverence, all homage, all affection, from the woman that once adored him! He shall search for her in bower and hall, and find her not, to share the fruits of his sin and infamy. No, Charles; thou mayst revel amid empty pomps if thou canst, but thy broken-

hearted wife shall kneel at the foot of the cross, in some lonely convent, forsaking thee and the world, to drag out her days in penitence for another's crime. O noble and wretched Joanna; is this thy reward? Is it by a cruel, violent death thou must pass from a life of many sorrows! Charles, couldst thou have the heart to look on her dying agonies? Couldst thou behold those eyes closed forever, that beamed so kindly on thee, knowing thyself her murderer, and ever hope for peace again? Picture her lying, this moment, cold and lifeless at thy feet; and then remember the hour of thine own dissolution, fearful and frantic with the pangs of remorse! — perhaps bloody, unconsolated, deserted by man, frowned upon by the unutterable wrath of God! Thou *must* die, Charles; thou knowest not *when*; but be it to-morrow, or in a decrepid old age, the memory of this very moment, fleeting so swiftly by us, will be with thee then. It speeds, — it speeds; — it will be gone, never to return! Oh, seize it, my wretched husband! It hurries thee to perdition, and I cling to thee in vain. Oh Joanna! more than mother! when his children ask me of thy death, what shall I say? Have mercy on us all, Charles! Cover not thy innocent offspring with ignominy. Leave me not to shudder, when I speak to them of their father! Hath any man a right to bequeath shame to his children?

Have mercy on thyself; it is for thine own soul, — for thy salvation I plead; and the invisible God, who hears and sees us this moment, will remember these tears against thee! — yet I would die any death, to save thee from this complicated guilt! Thou yield-est! I see it in thy softening aspect; — the cloud passes from thy brow; — thy lip quivers, — thou art saved! Holy Mother, be praised! Guardian angels, are about us, — and the discomfited fiend retires!

“Thou, — thou art, indeed, my guardian angel, glorious, inspired being!” cried Charles.

“Give not *me* the honor,” said Margaret; “but haste, — fly, — trust no messenger, — go in person. If I am worthy to be her sister’s child, let me look once more on that august countenance. Come to me with forgiveness from her living lips upon thy brow, or never approach me again. Nay; bring her from the prison that dishonors thee; or the wife of Durazzo becomes the bride of Heaven! — And Thou, — image of a suffering Savior, listen to my vows!”

As she spoke she threw herself exhausted before the crucifix. Durazzo cast but a single glance on her kneeling figure, on a face pale with the anguish of the scene and streaming with tears, and on eyes uplifted in fervent faith. He rushed from the cell, and Margaret heard his rapid steps as he fled along the cloister; — the eager voice of Giovanni; — the

loud demand for his war-horse. Then came the bustle among the soldiers, — the trampling of the charger, — the furious gallop, dying away in the distance, — the gradual subsiding of the confusion within doors, and all was again still. It seemed like a dream. She prostrated herself in prayer, till nearly an hour had passed away; then she arose and returned to the cell the friars had appropriated to her, and at its door, found the page, his countenance beaming with joy. "All will go well;" cried he. "The priest had but left my master, when we arrived. The caitiff took with him four Hungarians; he durst not ask such service of Neapolitans; and they rode up and down the river bank, vainly seeking boat, bridge, or fording place. Then they ascended the pass to a narrowing of the stream, and there cut down trees and threw them across. I tracked them so far and returned; told the King as he came forth, and he galloped thither at once. He will overtake them, lady; they must delay to fell trees from time to time, as they pass the mountain torrents, and he will press unchecked over their bridges; — all is safe! By the gray light of dawn, I saw his white charger but now, as he passed the face of the Black Rock, nearly half way up the mountain side; he cannot be far behind them." Margaret clasped her hands thankfully, and retired to bear her suspense, where

solicitude of the most intense nature is always best endured, — in solitude.

Giovanni was right. The monk had been delayed, finding no passage across the swollen stream; but bent on fulfilling his atrocious mission, he had gone higher up the river, where it issued from the gorge between two wooded cliffs, that nearly met over its bed; and here a few trees, hastily felled, had allowed him and his ruffians to reach the opposite bank, far above which rose the solitary fortress. Charles, acting once more under the better impulses of his nature, pursued his own myrmidons furiously; yet so long had been the interval between their departure from the monastery and his own, that his heart almost sickened with despair, as he followed their tracks up the steep ascent, and dashed over the rude bridges they had constructed. Higher, they seemed to have met with less to delay them; the old bridges had not been carried away by the upper brooks; and the perspiration stood on his brow, as he emerged from the forest trees, which encircled the lower region of the mountain. Raising himself on his stirrups, he looked over the stunted firs and gray rocks; — not a figure was to be seen moving up the melancholy waste. The mists of the valley had not begun to ascend, and the air around was so pure, so full of light from the yet unrisen sun, that he seemed to

have reached the very birth-place of the morning. No matin song of birds, as on lower earth, welcomed the approaching god of Day; nor did the wild scream of the still slumbering eagle break the silence of those awful solitudes; a silence more dreadful than the voice of battle to the conscience-smitten man, who felt as if his guilty soul were here brought alone, face to face, with his Maker. Onward he pressed, and the noble animal he rode strained every nerve against the steep ascent; now striking fire with his hoofs, as he clattered over the rocks; now bounding along the boggy interval, where the short Alpine grasses and wild flowers yielded to his hurricane passage. By snatches the pleadings of his weeping Margaret haunted the fierce rider, and the words, "picture her, lying cold and lifeless at thy feet!" sounded ever and anon in his ear, while at each fresh pang of remorse and terror, he goaded the snow-white flanks of his charger till the blood streamed from them. Occasionally the towers of Il Muro came in sight, clearly defined against the morning sky; but in vain he eyed them; they told no tales of the work doing within their dark circuit. He knew not if the murderer's step had yet touched their threshold, or whether their noble inmate still slumbered peacefully, unconscious that the wing of the destroying angel waved so near her.

He reached at last a spot, where the road, narrowed almost to a footpath, made a sharp turn round a cliff, which rose high on his right; while on the left, a steep slope led down to the brink of a fearful chasm. Heedless of the dizzying abyss, as he was about to wheel rapidly round the projecting angle of the rock, he almost came violently in contact with the person of a man descending on foot. It was the monk; his cowl thrown back, — his face more ghastly than usual, — his eyes wild. Both, for a moment, gazed on each other as if thunderstruck, and then Durazzo, though his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth, demanded abruptly, “Is it over?”

“No; she lives,” replied the monk, attempting to put his hand on Charles’s bridle, — “but” —

Durazzo stayed not to hear the sentence completed; again he plunged the spurs into his nearly spent charger, and rushing violently between Father Matteo and the rocky wall on his right, turned the corner and continued his upward course. — He heard not the cry that followed him; he knew not that the shock had thrown the miserable monk upon the slope, on whose verge he was standing. It was smooth and slaty; its inclination almost perpendicular; not a shrub, not a blade of grass grew upon it, and as the wretch alternately slid and rolled down, in vain he

clutched the pebbles that filled his grasp, without staying his destruction. He was at the brink of the precipice, — he was gone! Yet he had time to know and feel the complete horror of his situation. Below the verge of the cliff, a few young trees sprang from the interstices of the rocks, on one of which the falling monk seized with a frantic grasp. One look upward at the blue sky with fleecy clouds sailing across, — a single shuddering glance downward. The roar of the cataract came up distinctly; he saw the white foam at the bottom of the gloom; he felt the shrub to which he clung bending, — giving way; and heard the earth and stones around rattling and thundering down the face of the precipice. For an instant, like flashes of lightning, the recollection of crime, and terrors of judgment darted through his soul; in another moment all was over. In the midst of health and strength, in the full possession of his faculties, and conscious of his situation, the bad man went to his account. When the heats of summer dried up the mountain torrent, the wolf and the bird of prey alone knew where his bones lay amid the rocks of a lonely defile, untrodden by the foot of man; and a rumor went abroad that the ambitious Dominican, the proud Confessor of Durazzo, who had disappeared so mysteriously from amidst men, had perished by the hands of the lawless banditti of the Apennines.

CHAPTER XIII.

REFRESHING had been the slumbers of Joanna, on the night preceding the twenty-eighth of May; and pleasant dreams had hovered about her pillow, bringing round her the scenes and friends of her youth. The beautiful face of Philippa, the Catanese, whom years before she had fondly cherished with the friendship of unsuspecting girlhood, — whom she had seen torn from her arms to perish in tortures, — had smiled upon her again and again, amid her visions; and as she awoke at daybreak, the lovely phantom seemed to melt gradually away, still smiling and beckoning her; while above and in the background, the yet more celestial countenance of the Holy Mother looked down on the dreamer with an aspect that breathed peace and consolation.

She rose, not to mourn over the vanishing illusion and at the harsh realities about her; but to kneel in gratitude, because happy dreams were not shut out from the prisoner; — because unseen protection had

guarded her slumbers, and cheered her drooping spirit. Her late indisposition had passed away, and an exhilarating perception of returning strength, — a luxury unknown to one who never experiences sickness, — ran through her veins. She stood at her favorite window, which looked eastward into the very heart of the mountain scenery, and as the dappled skies gradually brightened with crimson and gold, a thought of the vain earthly pomps, in which she had once taken such delight, stole into her mind. “Idle and frivolous were ye all!” she said to herself, “and mercifully was I drawn away from snares and temptations. When the work is done, — when the spirit is purified, — then will it be called away. But as yet, earth holds something to which it cleaves. Could I but linger to speak one cheering word to Otho, — to embrace my beloved Margaret once more, — to kiss the fair brows of her children! — could I but see my poor, deluded, miserable Charles, once more touched with penitence, his hard heart softened like the rock in the wilderness, and gushing again with pure affections! Cannot the God, who smote the firm granite with the prophet’s rod, work a moral miracle? — Why am I haunted with such fond fancies! Let me not become a dreamer, when the heavens are flooded with the broad light of day. Enough for visions in the dead hour of night, when the eye sees not, when

the hand is weary, and the senses crave their necessary repose."

So saying, she shook off the inclination for melancholy reverie, which was stealing over her, and with one admiring glance at the mists which had covered the valley like a sea, and were now climbing upwards in silver wreaths, she turned energetically to her morning tasks. A single volume in Latin, the production of a venerable Father of an earlier century, had lately found its way to her aerial prison; and she often amused herself with committing passages to memory, or reading it aloud in choice Italian, for not in vain had she been educated in the court of her grandfather Robert of Sicily, the patron of reviving literature. Thus employed she sat; and as she read, she slowly unbound the thick tresses which were now bearing testimony that sickness and trouble silver the dark locks of woman no less than time. The last few months had changed them much; but it was with a faint smile, not with a sigh, that the most beautiful female of her day looked on the token of her fading loveliness. Like all strong-minded women, she had never prized the flattery that chose her person for its theme; but had sought from the wise and good that approbation which age could not forfeit; and she neither mourned what was lost, nor triumphed in the consciousness that her majestic beauty might even yet have dazzled a courtier's eye.

In the midst of these quiet occupations, she heard the immense door unbarred, at the end of a long vaulted passage, leading to her apartment. It was the customary sound at this period of the day; but there was an unusual violence in the haste with which it was thrown back; and the footsteps approaching along the stone floor were heavy and many. "Another embassy from Charles!" she said to herself; "it is an uncommon and unseemly hour. They must bring me tidings of pressing importance. Oh! could it be that among the mysterious vicissitudes of life, Anjou hath terminated my captivity, and my freedom were at hand! Be quiet, throbbing heart!"

Striving to conquer the emotion with which this thought, — so natural, yet so wild, — tinged her cheek and brightened her eye, she surveyed the opening door of her apartment. Those without held a whispering consultation; it seemed as if they hesitated on the very threshold; but her suspense was not long. Four strangers entered, one by one, — silently arranging themselves along the wall. Theirs were not the well known faces of Neapolitan barons; their limbs were clad neither in the glittering armor nor the silken tunic of the nobles; she missed even the familiar, dark eye of Italy, which might have spoken some encouragement. Foreigners, — Hungarians, — hired ruffians! she read them and their fatal business

at a glance, and a sudden sickness of the heart for an instant came upon her. It was not in human nature to look, without apprehension, on death, approaching so unexpectedly, with violence, perhaps with torture. But though she involuntarily pressed her hands together, clasping the crucifix which always hung at her girdle, she neither started up with undignified terror, nor uttered a single ejaculation. Three of the men gazed on her with cold and curious eyes; she saw no token of sensibility or humanity there, to which she might appeal; they were of the lowest rank of society, utterly abandoned and inured to crime. Their leader alone appeared embarrassed and unable to meet the eye of Joanna, as if capable of appreciating the magnanimity, with which she seemed prepared to encounter her fate. After waiting in vain for him to disclose his errand, she herself broke silence at last. "You are a stranger to me, — a foreigner. Do you speak Italian?"

The man answered in the affirmative.

"Then if your business be with Joanna of Naples, she is before you; unfold it."

He still hesitated, — looked at the door, — at his followers, — and began. "Lady, I am not wont to shrink from that which I undertake; but the gold that has bought my services, this day, will be hardly earned. I know not how to look upon you, and remember the reward that is to banish my poverty."

“I understand you ; my hour is come. Tell me only by whose order a life of sorrows is to close in blood.” The Hungarian shook his head. “You are forbidden to speak a name so high? It is an idle mystery. My prison walls are protection to me against all save one, and his authority alone can admit the hired assassin to my guarded cell. But it is best ;—the sound of *that* name, as the sanction of such a deed !—let me not hear it. Would I had died peacefully on yonder couch, and spared his soul this last leap into sin and misery. I could not have believed,—could not have dreamed it ! I will not think of it,—for the departing spirit should be calm.—Stranger, by what mode is it your will that I should pass from this troubled scene of shadows ?”

“It is the pleasure of those who sent us hither, that no mark of violence remain on your person.”

“I thank them for the unintentional grace ; so much of the woman and the Queen remains uncrushed, that I should have shrunk from the fierce handling of your ruffians. Alas !—idle thought !—say on.”

“We are ordered to allow your Majesty a choice between three deaths ;” said the man, awed into the use of a term, which had but seldom reached her ear of late.

She repeated the word sadly after him. “There is but *One* Majesty, and no mortal eye hath seen that.

I rejoice that I have never forgotten it. Go on." The captain pointed without speaking to the pillows of her couch. She understood him, and shuddered. "Suffocation! — that is indeed a death of struggles! Four men to stifle down the breath of one helpless woman! Oh no! — no!" — "The Castle well is deep, — it is full of water, — but that too is a fearful death;" said the same man, his aspect softening more and more.

Joanna paused; — for a moment the innate love of life stirred in her heart. — "If yonder misguided Prince should repent!" said she; "he was ever the victim of impulse. He is violent as the winds, and as unsteady. Two hours' delay may bring counter-manding orders."

The man shook his head impatiently, and darted an anxious glance at the door, from whence a harsh voice was heard exclaiming, — "Stilicho, — speed! speed! I charge you." The relenting murderer remembered his price, and hastening to the door received from the hands of some unseen person a silver cup, which he presented to the Queen, saying in a low voice, — "Let this be your choice, — it is sure, — but quiet."

"What! by my own hand?"

"If you reject the cup, — remember how rudely the deed must be done. There is no escape, — no

delay possible. Spare me, noble lady, the most hateful part of my vile office. I was not always what I now am; and my heart once more beats with the feelings of a man. I conjure you, force me not to order those degraded wretches to lay hands upon you."

"He has chosen his instrument ill," said Joanna, searching the countenance of the Hungarian with a lingering hope.

"No;" replied he, averting his face; "I cannot save you, — and time presses."

Joanna's eyes filled with tears as she took the cup, and said solemnly, — "Appear not at the judgment seat against him who has laid this burden on thy soul! Oh my unhappy, parricidal child! — I bow to the dreadful necessity, and choose as best I may. The deed is not mine; I only strive to meet, becomingly, the death I cannot avoid. Even in this awful moment, let me not forget to thank him who performs his task with no brutal roughness. Is it forbidden me to hope for the rites of religion? Is there no priest sent to shrive the departing soul?" Stilicho signified to her, that there was not. An expression of bitter disappointment escaped her; — "I would fain have manifested my reverence for religion with the last act of my life. It is well, — all is well. There is mercy inexhaustible, to which my heart whispers that even the unshriven sinner may appeal."

So saying, she sunk on her knees, lost in devotion. There was no agitation perceptible in her frame ; she seemed about to commend herself calmly to Divine Protection, at the approach of quiet sleep ; and after a brief exercise of the spirit, she again rose with an almost superhuman dignity in her motions. “ I am strengthened ; — I am ready ! ” said she ; and throwing back the locks which concealed her countenance, bright already with the hues of immortality, she lifted the cup of poison, and for a moment surveyed the dark liquor it contained, earnestly. As she raised it to her lips, the door opposite opened, and Father Matteo presented himself, haggard with anxiety and impatience, and ready to utter one exclamation of triumphant revenge as he looked on her despair. She paused only to greet him with a smile of celestial sweetness. “ Father ! there is no pride, — no anger on the grave’s brink ! Tell him I forgive him, — that I have prayed for him, — and may God pardon you all ! ” With these words, she drank the deadly liquor to its dregs, and then regarded the group with the same heavenly serenity as before.

The monk stood cowed, — trembling, — before her. He had not intended to witness such a scene ; and so unexpected, so unearthly was the aspect of his victim, as she stood full in the stream of red sunlight from the eastern window, which seemed to cast a glory

round her brows,—so touching, yet so sublime was the sweetness of her address to him, that for the first time in his life, he felt that he had a *conscience*,—a fearful thing to deal with; for the first time in his life, the majesty of virtue broke upon his mind. One moment he stood in dumb horror,—his knees knocking together, and then turning about, he fled, panic stricken, from the walls of Il Muro. His horse had dropped under him at its gates on his arrival, and he rushed wildly down the mountain on foot, a thousand passions making a pandemonium of his breast. His fatal rencounter with Durazzo has been described.

For a short space after the departure of the monk, an awful stillness was in the chamber of crime. The three Hungarians, whose services the use of the poison had rendered needless, retired at a signal from their leader; the just risen sun looked in upon the motionless Queen, who had seated herself near the open window; and with her eyes fixed upon the crucifix, appeared again absorbed in mental exercises most fitting her condition; while Stilicho leaned against the doorway, struggling with the new and strange sentiments of reverence and compassion, which the events of this day had developed in a bosom not entirely hardened. Suddenly Joanna uttered a faint cry of pain, putting her hand to her side; but as the Hungarian started involuntarily forward,

she smiled sadly and said, "It is gone; — it must return again; but it is gone for the present. I would say one thing more before my tongue shall lose its office. They have doubtless bound you to secrecy. Keep your vow. A dying woman adjures you to spare the fame of her murderer, — for the sake of his innocent wife and children. Tell no man that my death arrow came from the hand that should have closed my dying eyes with filial tenderness. Alas, Charles, — the draught was sweet compared with the gall of that thought! — You promise me? — that is well. It is better my people should believe that I sickened, and died, and went calmly to my rest. It is true; I am ill, — I am ill! would it had been sent of God; but I can bear it patiently."

She then leaned against the high-backed chair, and closing her eyes meekly, she pressed the emblem of her faith to her lips; but another stab of pain soon forced her to moan aloud, and as she looked upward imploringly to heaven, Stilicho saw that her paleness had increased. Falling on his knees before her, he exclaimed, "Let me depart. I cannot bear it. I have looked on death many a time, — but not on such as this, — let me depart!"

Compassionately the Queen turned to the subdued man of guilt, as she answered, — "Aye, it is better that you should go. Forbid my women to come

hither till noonday ; then they will find me sleeping indeed. I would that no heart should be wrung by witnessing the sufferings through which I must pass ; — will they be long, think you ? ”

“ I know not,” said Stilicho ; “ the monk prepared the draught.”

“ Why do I ask ? ” added Joanna. “ Eternity alone is long : moments and hours are nothing to me now. Oh begone ! these pangs come fast and keen. Repent, — and be forgiven. Trust not the absolution of priests. Nay ; *I* forgive you, but that too is the forgiveness of frail humanity, — of kindred dust. Go ; for the venom works fast.” Stilicho saw tokens of its dreadful efficiency in the increasing lividness of her complexion and in her dilating eyeballs. He too hurried, shuddering, from her presence ; — and Joanna of Naples was left to struggle alone with death !

Half an hour passed away ; she still breathed ; but her limbs were becoming cold and lifeless ; stupor was upon her open but dull organs of vision, and her arms hung down powerless by her side ; yet consciousness had not altogether left her. Her lips moved occasionally, and a gleam of intelligence now and then shot from those orbs, which once beamed light from the pure soul within ; the spirit seemed loth to quit its fair shrine. At last the sacred stillness was again broken by the sound of approaching

footsteps. The Queen heard them; there was something familiar in the sound. She struggled to rise; and as she sat upright, stiff, and with the countenance of a corpse, Charles of Durazzo appeared on the threshold, himself hardly wearing the semblance of a living man, so wan and spectre-like was his aspect. With an unearthly cry he rushed forward and fell at her feet, — and then suddenly rising again, exclaimed, — “Thou art not dying, — thou must not die!” He looked wildly about the apartment, — “I see them not; I see no mark of intrusion here, — I am not then too late! Thou art ill, my mother?”

“Aye, — ill unto death, Charles! Thou hast called me back from its shadows; but they gather, — they gather.” — Her speech faltered, and her sight grew dim again; but she pointed to the silver cup on the table. Charles looked at it, — at his expiring benefactress; there was unutterable anguish on his face, and he covered it with his hands; but a bright smile irradiated the features of the Queen, as she murmured, — “God hath spared my reason, — and I see thee mourn thy crime. Could I but have spoken one word to my brave husband, — to my sweet Margaret! — To die is not dreadful, Charles! Heaven hath permitted me to behold thy tears, — and I go where there is mercy. I would not return, — I would not return!” The words died inarticulately

on her lips, as thus, thoughtful of others to the last, she soothed the sinner's remorse. Charles endeavored to support her, when writhing with a sudden return of pain, she attempted to sink on her knees, but in the effort fell heavily forward from his enfeebled arms, and lay dead at the feet of her murderer !

The Hungarians had been guided down a shorter path to the valley by some mountaineers ; and when the wretched Durazzo once more reached the monastery, a rumor was already circulating, that the Queen had died of a sudden illness. Margaret had heard and understood it ; and shunning her guilty husband, was already on her way to take shelter in a distant convent. Once in her after life, she appears on the page of history, as regent during her son's minority. The young Giovanni, alienated from the master he had loved till so foul a crime repelled the most enduring affection, had fled to Otho, who, cured of his wounds and released from prison, was hurrying to join Louis of Anjou.

The body of the lamented Joanna lay in state in the church of Santa Chiara, bearing no external mark of violence ; where the tears of a grateful and idolizing people bewailed her unmerited sorrows ; and mothers, as they looked on her marble features, thinking that so much beauty, genius, magnanimity, and virtue would never again be vouchsafed to them

in the form of an earthly sovereign, read the solemn lesson, and forbore to ask of Heaven those external advantages for their children, which, even when combined with high moral qualities, had brought to one woman so little felicity.

But of her assassin, the pen of Fiction shall not tell the tale of retribution. "After a turbulent and unhappy reign of three short years, he deemed himself securely fixed on the throne of Naples, and proceeded to Hungary to wrest the crown from Maria, the daughter and heiress of Louis of Hungary, the old enemy of Queen Joanna. The young Queen of Hungary, who was then about fifteen, was of a generous, frank, and noble nature; but her mother, the regent Elizabeth, was more than a match for Durazzo in artifice and cruelty. By her machinations, he was decoyed into the apartment of Maria, and while he stood reading a paper, a gigantic Hungarian, secretly stationed for that purpose, felled him to the earth with his sabre. His death, however, was not instantaneous;—he lingered for two days in agonies, neglected and abandoned; at length his enemies, becoming impatient of his prolonged existence, and fearful of his recovery, caused him to be suffocated or strangled."

THE END.







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